THE FOURTH CRIME CLUB OMNIBUS

IN this Fourth Omnibus the Crime Club continues its policy of offering its most successful publications embodied in one volume. Here you will find four outstanding detective books for the price of one—7s. 6d. *The Devil Man* is, as Edgar Wallace said himself, " the best story I have ever written." *The Mystery at Friar's Pardon* was the book with which we introduced Martin Porlock to detective fiction readers—the book that showed so clearly the promise which has since been fulfilled by his latest book—*X v. Rex*—which is not only selected by the Crime Club, but also recommended by the Book Society. In *Death Comes to Perigord*, by John Ferguson, we have a thrilling story which has the romantic beauty of the Channel Islands for its background. It is an unusual story with an unexpected climax, and keeps the reader's interest and excitement well maintained until the end. Finally we have *Dead Man's Watch*—another of Mr. and Mrs. Cole's baffling mystery stories. It is a first-rate Superintendent Wilson yarn, which keeps the reader guessing right up until the last moment.

THE FOURTH CRIME CLUB OMNIBUS

THE DEVIL MAN	EDGAR WALLACE
MYSTERY AT FRIAR'S PARDON	MARTIN PORLOCK
DEATH COMES TO PERIGORD	JOHN FERGUSON
DEAD MAN'S WATCH	G. D. H. & M. COLE

Published for

THE CRIME CLUB LTD.

by

W. COLLINS SONS & CO LTD

LONDON

Copyright.

Printed in Great Britain

THE DEVIL MAN

CHAPTER I

On the western outskirts of Sheffield—the Sheffield of 1875—there was a dingy red factory that had seen the bankruptcies of at least three concerns which had been housed within its high walls. In this year it was occupied by the staff of a Mr. Wertheimer, who produced nothing that was of commercial value, and was rather secretive about what he hoped to produce at all. He called himself and his partner, known and unknown, "The Silver Steel Company," which, as Baldy said subsequently, was a contradiction of terms.

On a certain wintry night a young man dropped a rope ladder from one of the walls and came gingerly to the ground. His name was Kuhl, he was a Swiss from the Canton de Vaud, by profession an engineer, and by disposition an admirer of attractive ladies.

He picked his way across the uneven ground towards the road and was met half-way by two men. A woman, driving into Sheffield, saw the three talking by the side of the road where a closed wagonette, drawn by two horses, was standing. The men were talking loudly and gesticulating at one another. Looking back over her shoulder, she saw what was apparently a free fight in progress, and whipped up her horse.

She did not inform the police because, as she said, it was none of her business, and, besides, fights were pretty frequent in those days and in that part of the world. Later she informed Sergeant Eltham, but could give no satisfactory account of how the fight finished.

This Sergeant Eltham was a police officer who never ceased to apologise for being seen in public without his uniform. But for this it might almost have been forgotten that he had ever worn a uniform at all, since he was the most astute of the "plain clothes men" that ever went on the roll of the Sheffield Police Force. He was tall, broad-shouldered, bushy-bearded, bald. Wrongdoers, who did not like him and never spoke of him except in the lurid terms, called him "Baldy" or "Whiskers" as the fancy seized them.

He was a man who was seldom at a loss even in the most baffling situation, but he confessed to being beaten when the Silver Steel Company called upon him, for the second time in three months, to ask him to solve the mystery of a lost employé.

He came into Alan Mainford's surgery one cold night in December to drink hot rum and water and gossip about people and things, as was his practice. The sergeant was a bachelor living with a widowed sister, and his recreations were few. Dr. Mainford often wondered what he did to pass the time before the beginning of their friendship—it had its genesis in a violent toothache which Alan ended summarily and in the early hours of the morning with a No. 3 forcep and a muscular forearm.

"I don't know about these Silver Steel people, doctor," he said.

He had a deliberate method of speaking and a weakness for long words, was known as an orator at social functions, held important office in the Order of Oddfellows, and was a Buffalo of the highest grade.

Alan smiled as he filled his pipe.

He was a good-looking young man, who sacrificed a certain amount of confidence amongst elderly patients

because he shaved clean, a habit that made him look even younger; so that people often referred to him as a "bit of a boy," and expressed their firm determination of never allowing him so much as to bandage a cut finger. He had hardly lost the tan of India, spent more time out of doors than his brother professionals, kept a couple of hunters in the Melton country and might, had he desired, have found an easier and a more lucrative practice in more pleasant surroundings, for he enjoyed a good income and had expectations which must inevitably be realised.

"What don't you know about the Silver Steel Company? he asked.

Baldy shook his shiny head.

"In the first place, silver is silver and steel's steel," he said. "It's ridiculous and absurd to mix 'em up. In the second place, they're foreigners. I don't like foreigners. Give me the true-born Briton!"

Alan chuckled.

"You are what Mr. Gladstone calls 'insular,'" he began, and Baldy snorted.

"Gladstone! Don't talk about that man! He'll ruin the country one of these days, mark my words! Now, Dizzy——"

"Don't let's talk politics. Go on with your foreigners."

Baldy sipped his rum and made a little face.

"Sheffield's full of 'em lately. There's this Silver Steel lot and there's Madame What's-her-name over in——"

He snapped his fingers in an effort to recall the location. Baldy could never remember names, that was the most colossal of all his weaknesses.

"Anyway, there's her, and that German lot that are

experimenting at what-do-you-call-the-place? Taking the bread out of our mouths."

"We're probably taking the bread out of their mouths, too," said Alan good-humouredly. "Don't forget, Baldy——"

"Say Eltham, or say sergeant," pleaded the other. "Baldy is low."

"Well, don't forget that Sheffield is the centre of the steel world and people come here from all over Europe to pick up wrinkles. What are the Silver Steel people doing?"

"The Lord knows," said Baldy piously. "Turnin' silver into steel or *vice versa*—a Latin expression. Only a little factory, and all the workmen sleep in cottages inside the walls—the cottages were built by a feller in Eccleshall who got sixty pounds apiece for 'em. Foreigners all of 'em. Can't speak a word of English. Works guarded by men with guns. I've seen it with my own eyes! I've warned 'em about that."

Alan picked up a small log and put it carefully on the top of the glowing coals in the grate.

"It's a secret process, I expect," he said. "Sheffield is packed tight with mysterious factories trying some new-fangled scheme."

Baldy nodded.

"With electricity, according to what I hear. It doesn't seem possible. Electricity is lights and cures rheumatism. I had a penn'orth at the winter fair. You hold two brass handles and a feller pulls out a piston and you have pins and needles all up your arm. I don't know how it's done, there's a trick in it somewhere. But what's electricity got to do with steel? It's absurd, ridiculous and confusing. It's against the laws of nature, too."

There had been, he explained, some rum things happening at the Silver Steel works. One of the workmen went for a walk on a Sunday night and had not been seen since. Then a month later another workman, who had learnt enough English to correspond with a Sheffield young lady, had climbed over the wall and gone to see her "clandestinely." He had not been seen since, except by a woman who saw him in the company of two men.

"Fightin', accordin' to this witness, a woman named . . . bless my life, I'll forget my own name next! Anyway, he's gone. And why not? According to Mr. What's-his-name, who owns the works, this man lives in Switzerland among the Alps. Who would live in Sheffield if he had an Alp to go to?"

"I know Wertheimer," nodded Alan. "One of his men had a hand crushed and I attended him. What do you suspect about the missing men—foul play?"

"Foul grandmothers!" snorted Baldy. "Gone home—that's all. Run away with gels. This feller was writing to a girl—a Miss—dear me! I've got it on the tip of my tongue! She went away the same night. Nobody knows where. It's the old story—marry in haste and repent at leisure."

"Who is Mr. Dyson?" asked Alan.

Baldy frowned.

"Dyson? Don't know him. Who is he?"

"He's an engineer, I think. I met him at the works. An enormously tall man. He's been in America and seemed to know Wertheimer."

"Dyson—I know him. A long un! He's all right—a gentleman. He's with the railway. Got a pretty sharp tongue, too."

Baldy mixed another glass of grog, using his own bottle—he insisted upon this act of partnership.

"Too many foreigners—not enough good Yorkshiremen in Sheffield. What's the use of foreigners to us? Nothing."

Alan was interested in the missing men and asked questions.

"I don't know any more than that. I've got too much work to do to bother about 'em. There's a regular outbreak of burglary in this neighbourhood and I pretty well know the man that's doing it. When I say 'man,' I ask pardon of my Maker, for this chap is no man. He's a monstrosity. He oughtn't to be on the face of the earth."

"In fact, he' no gentleman," laughed Alan. "I am going to turn you out, Baldy. Don't scowl—it's a term of affection. I'm off to bed. And perhaps to-night a few expected babies will postpone their arrival until I've had a spell of sleep."

No maternity case brought Alan out of his warm bed. The hammerings on his door that woke him were the hammer blows of fate. He went out into the raw night to face new and tremendous factors which were to change and reshape his life.

CHAPTER II

DR. ALAN MAINFORD was at the age when even a night call from an unknown patient had in it the stuff of adventure. Dixon brought round the pony trap and offered a few bitter comments on the weather, the hour, the difficulty of harnessing the cob by the light of a lantern which the wind blew out every few minutes, and, above all, and most insistently, the futility of obeying every summons that comes out of the night.

"The old doctor used to say: 'If they can't last till mornin' I can't save 'em to-night'—that's what the old doctor used to say," he said darkly.

Dixon was stocky and bow-legged, as became a groom. On the finest summer morning he would have been disgruntled, for it was his habit to complain.

"The old doctor——" he began again.

"Blow the old doctor!" said Alan.

"He's dead," said Dixon, hurt and reproachful.

"Of course he's dead—your grousing killed him."

Dixon never liked the word "grousing"; it was an army word and outlandish. He resented Alan's three years of service as an army doctor, did his best to hide from the world that his employer had ever had that experience. It was a tradition of the medical profession in the year 1875 that army doctors were without quality, and Dixon had been brought up in the traditions of the profession.

Alan took the reins in his hand and looked up and down the dreary street. Snow and sleet were driving

down from the north-west; the gas-lamps were dim nebulæ of foggy light.

"Thank Gawd I rough-shod him yesterday!" said Dixon, his mind, as ever, on the impatient and rather annoyed animal between the shafts. "Mind that hill near the Cross—he's fresh to-night, poor little feller."

He held the horse's head as Alan stepped up into the trap, wrapped a leather-covered rug waist-high about him and sat on the driver's seat.

"All right—let go his head."

The cob slipped, recovered, found his feet and his gait and went swiftly down the white-covered road. Wet snow beat into Alan's face, blinding him. Clear of Banner Cross the street lights vanished, and he drove into a black void which the faint light of his trap lamps did little to illuminate.

Happily, the cob knew the road, knew, in his peculiar way, every hedge, every isolated house. Where the road turned sharply he checked of his own will; he fell into a walk at every sharp rise and picked his way cautiously down every declivity.

Alan dreamed his waking dreams, which were in the main as fantastical and unreal as the shadows about him. He dreamed of a day when the railroad would run to the least village; perhaps there would some day be road locomotives on the lines of traction engines and steam rollers, but less cumbersome and cheaper. Perhaps a time would come when every man would have his own little engine which ran at incredible speeds—twenty miles an hour possibly—along every highway.

He hoped Mrs. Stahm's servants would be able to give him tea or coffee—the latter for choice. The Germans made good coffee, or was she Swedish? He

had seen her often, riding in the foreign-looking victoria with her coachman and her footman on the box, a dark-eyed, inscrutable woman of uncertain age. Nobody knew her ; his small circle of friends used to speculate upon her identity and wonder what brought her to the outskirts of Sheffield and the loneliness of Brinley Hall, until they learnt that she was the widow of a Swiss engineer who had invented a new steel which was yet in its experimental stage. Apparently she lived near to the scene of the experiments, not because her interest in her husband's invention was academic or sentimental, but because she herself had had something of a scientific training.

Young Dibden, whose father was senior partner of the firm that were trying out the invention, spoke of her with respect.

" By gad, she's clever ! A woman, too . . . ! You wouldn't expect a woman to know anything about the chemistry of steel, but she does. Got the process from A to Z . . . told Furley that he was old-fashioned . . . what was the word ? Archaic ! But she's odd—deuced odd. None of the women likes her—they loathe her. She doesn't ask 'em to tea and they don't ask her. She makes 'em shiver, and by heavens she makes me shiver too ! "

Alan grinned into the dark night. Would Madame Stahm make him shiver ? He saw humanity from his own peculiar angle. Men and women could be majestic and terrifying and all the things that impress, but usually they were never really interesting until he was called in to see them : rather pitiful creatures who had shed their majesty and were neither impressive nor awe-inspiring.

The cob went at a steady gait, clop-clopping through

the snow covering of the road. Once he shied at something Alan could not immediately see. Snatching up the pony, he brought him to the centre of the road and, as he did so, he saw the figure which had startled the animal: the shape of a man trudging through the street. He shouted abusively in a harsh voice. Alan heard the word "lift," but he was giving no lifts that night. There were some queer people in this neighbourhood—burglaries had been numerous; it was not a night to invite any unknown pedestrian to share the trap.

His gloved hands were stiff and numbed with cold when he turned the cob's head towards the two stone pillars that flanked the drive. It wound up through an avenue of anæmic-looking trees to the big house. No lights showed in any of the windows. Stiffly he descended, gathered up the reins . . .

"I'll take the horse."

Alan almost jumped.

The voice came from the darkness of the porch. Now he was dimly aware, not only of the figure in the dark porch, but that the door of the house was open. The hall was in darkness.

The man spoke again in a language which Alan did not understand. It sounded like one of the Scandinavian tongues. A second man came shambling into the open and went to the cob's head.

"He will stable the horse and look after him, doctor. Will you come this way?"

Suddenly the lantern he was carrying threw out a strong yellow beam. Electricity was in the days of its infancy, and this was the first hand-lamp that Alan had ever seen—the famous Stahm lamp that was an object of curiosity for many years afterwards.

They passed into the hall, and the heavy door closed behind them.

"One moment—I will strike a lucifer and light the gas," said the guide.

Mainford waited. A match spluttered, and in a second the hall was illuminated.

The guide was a man of forty. He was well, even foppishly dressed. The long, yellow face was framed in side whiskers; there hung about him the nidor of stale cigar smoke.

"Before you go up, doctor"—he stood squarely between Alan and the broad staircase which led to the upper part of the house—"let me tell you that Madame is not ill—not ill as you would say that a person is ill, eh?"

English was not his native tongue, Alan realised. Though his accent was pure, the construction of his sentences, no less than his choice of words, betrayed him.

"She has storms in her brain; fears of death groundless. She is too clever. In woman that is terrible. For a long while she will go on, but sometimes there comes to her a sense of . . . bafflement. There is no such word, eh? But you understood. Good! A wall confronts her. She screams, she tries to climb up, she tries to burrow beneath, she tears at the stones with her pretty fingers. Absurd! Wait, I say, and the wall she will vanish. Mind"—he tapped his narrow forehead—"always mind will triumph! In such times the nasty little man can soothe her. You know him? I am sure you know him. Ach! Such a man! But the good Lord makes them in all shapes and sizes."

He went on, hardly stopping to find his breath, and

all the time his long, white hands gesticulated every emphasis.

"What is the matter with her now?" asked Alan, a little bewildered to discover that "Madame" was not ill.

It was a cool greeting after a six-mile drive on a stormy night. He did not trouble to wonder who this man was, or in what relationship he stood to his patient. Such matters did not greatly interest him. The name of his companion and his profession he was to learn immediately.

"Hysteria—no more. It is alarming, but I would not have sent for you. Madame thinks she will die. A doctor and a priest and the nasty little man. The priest, no! She shall not die, but she shall be ill if I do not bring her relief. I am Baumgarten—engineer. Dr. Stahm was my master—I his disciple. Eckhardt was also his disciple. He is dead. All thieves die sometime. He died in America of consumption. There is a God!"

Abruptly he turned and walked up the stairs, Alan, carrying the bag he had taken from underneath the seat of the trap, following. Who was Eckhardt? Why the malignant satisfaction that he had died so painfully? Eckhardt was a thief; what had he stolen?

At the head of the stairs was a wide landing. The walls were hung with tapestries; there was a suggestion of luxury, of immense wealth, and with it went an air of neglect and decay. There was a certain mustiness about the house which betokened a total disregard for fresh air or ventilation. Two of the tapestries hung crookedly; Alan saw that they were supported on loops of string from tenpenny nails driven into the panels.

"This way, my dear sir."

Baumgarten opened a recessed door and they passed, not into a bedroom, as Alan had expected, but into a great drawing-room. Though from the centre of the black ceiling hung a gas chandelier, where three yellow flames were burning within glass globes, it was almost as if he had walked into the outer dark. The walls, the carpets, the curtains were papered or draped in black. The furniture, when he could pick it out, was upholstered and lacquered in the same gloomy hue. The only relief to this manufactured gloom were the woman in pale green velvet who sat on the raised daïs at one end of the long room, and the white-clad nurse who stood by her side, watching Alan with a relief in her eyes which she did not attempt to disguise.

It was not on the patient, but on the nurse, that Dr. Mainford's attention was riveted. In her simple uniform she looked like some exquisite creature of the Renaissance with her dull gold hair which the nurse's bonnet could not hide, and her slim, perfectly poised figure. The exquisite moulding of her face, the red rose lips, the firm little chin, the ivory whiteness of her skin, left him breathless.

He knew most of the nurses in Sheffield, but this was a stranger to him.

"Well, well, well." It was Baumgarten's impatient voice. "There is madame to be seen, is it not?"

And then, almost with a wrench, Alan turned his attention to the woman in green. It was difficult to believe that she was human. Her face was an enamelled white, the dark eyes stared ahead of her; she seemed oblivious of her surroundings, of his presence, of anything that was earthly.

From her face, plastered thick with powder, he could

not judge her age. It was only when he saw the hands, tightly clenched on the arms of her velvet chair, that he judged her to be over fifty. She sat, stiff, motionless, bolt upright, her chin raised, her face expressionless. About her neck was a great circle of green stones. From their size he was satisfied they could not be emeralds; but here he was mistaken. A big emerald ring glittered on one finger. About each arm was bracelet upon bracelet, until she glittered from wrist to elbow.

Alan experienced a queer sense of embarrassment as he went to her and tried to take her hand. The clutching fingers could not be pried loose from their grip. He pushed up the jewelled circles, found her pulse and took out his watch. The pulse was faint but regular.

"Are you feeling ill?" he asked.

Madame Stahm made no answer, and he looked at the nurse inquiringly.

"She has been like this for nearly an hour," said the girl in a low voice. "I have tried everything. It looks like a cataleptic seizure, but Mr. Baumgarten says it is not unusual and that she will recover in time. She was taken ill last night at about seven," she went on. "It was dreadful!"

"Screaming?"

She nodded. He heard her quick sigh.

"Yes . . . dreadful. Mr. Baumgarten was alarmed. But the attack passed off, and he thought it was over. At eleven o'clock it came on again, worse."

She did not take her eyes from his when she spoke, and he saw in them the shadow of fear, which is very rarely met with in the eyes of a woman of her profession.

" What is your name ? " he asked.

" Jane Garden. I am from St. Mary's Hospital in London. I've been here a month."

She glanced past him towards Baumgarten, who stood motionless, his head bent, a frank and unabashed listener.

Alan stooped and looked at the woman's eyes. They were set ; the pupils were pin-pointed, and he made a little grimace.

" It is either hysteria or drugs——" he began.

" Neither—fool ! "

It was the green woman who almost snarled the words, and he was so startled that he dropped the stethoscope he was fitting.

She did not move, did not even turn her eyes in his direction. Only the thin lips moved.

" You have no sense, no brains ! You see only material things ! You do not examine the soul ! I project myself into the infinite, and you say ' hysteria ' ! I walk with Stahm and his shadow, Eckhardt, and you say ' drugs ' ! I live in the shades, I go out of the world, and you feel my pulse and listen to my heart and say : ' Ah, well, she is mad.' "

And then the dead figure came to life. He saw the bosom rise as she inhaled a deep breath ; the eyes moved slowly in his direction. The figure became suddenly alive.

" Who sent for this man ? Who sent for him ? " She almost screamed the words.

" I sent for him," said Baumgarten calmly. " You said you were dying, you asked for a doctor, a priest and the ugly man. Here is your doctor. The ugly man is coming—the priest, no."

She began speaking rapidly to him in a language

which was neither Scandinavian nor German. One word gave him the clue. They were talking in Russian. Both Baumgarten and Madame Stahm were Russian by birth, he discovered later.

The first part of her speech was obviously a flood of abuse; but gradually her voice and manner grew calmer, and the thin lips curled in a smile. When she turned to the doctor and spoke her manner was entirely changed.

"Most stupid of me, doctor," she said, so graciously that he was staggered. "I have these—what is the word?—fits! Hysteria? It is possible. But drugs—I do not think I have taken drugs—no, Baumgarten?"

He shook his head slowly, his eyes upon her.

"That is the truth," she said. "Now you shall feel my pulse."

She held out her hand almost gaily, and Alan's fingers closed upon a wrist that pulsated so strongly that it might not have been the same woman he had examined a few seconds before.

"It is hysteria possibly. I am a great trial to all my friends. But then, what woman is not? You are psychic, doctor?"

It was a word not very commonly used, and he frowned.

"Psychic? Do you mean seeing spooks and things?"

"Spooks and things," she repeated with an ironic little smile. "Eh? That is your idea of the psychic? Well, perhaps you are right, doctor. My nerves are bad."

She turned abruptly to Baumgarten.

"The ugly man, is he coming?"

Baumgarten looked at his watch.

" He should be here," he said, and went out of the room.

Madame Stahm regarded her professional caller with a quizzical smile.

" You do not know my nasty little man, I suppose ? Or does everybody know him ? He is a seer. People do not believe so, but he has divinity ! "

Alan for the moment was not interested in psychic things, or even ugly men who had divine qualities. He was intensely practical.

" Don't you think you should undress and go to bed ? " he said. " I can give you a bromide draught which can be made up at the chemists—there is one at the village two miles away."

She laughed a low, amused laugh.

" You say I take drugs, so you give me more, eh. That is funny ! "

" Rest will be very good for you," he said.

The nurse started from her contemplation of Alan.

" It will be very good for you," she urged. " You remember, I suggested a sleeping draught——"

" A sleeping draught, ach ! " Madame Stahm snapped her jewelled fingers. " No, I will have my ugly man and he will rest me. Jane doesn't like my ugly man."

There was no need for the girl to confirm this—her face told the story.

The squeak of the door handle made Alan Mainford turn, and then he saw Madame's seer.

CHAPTER III

HE was a queer, incongruous figure of a man. His height could not have been more than five feet; the big, dark, deep-set eyes were the one pleasant feature in a face which was utterly repulsive. They were the eyes of an intelligent animal. The forehead was grotesquely high, running in furrows almost to where, at the crown of the head, a mop of gray hair rolled back. The unshaven cheeks were cadaverous, deeply lined and hollow. There was a ferocity in the overthrust jaw as the little man moved it from side to side. His thick, rough coat was soddened with sleet, his boots left little pools of water on the black carpet. He wore home-knitted mittens, and in one hand clutched an ancient violin case.

"Delighted!" murmured madame. "You are a good man to come. I am in need of your inspiration. Play, play, play!"

The little man was glaring malignantly at Alan.

"You couldn't stop and gimme a lift, mister?" he demanded resentfully. "I must trudge through the muck and the mire. I called to tha', but no, he goes on —him ridin'—me walkin'!"

Alan's eyes had wandered to the nurse. She stood rigid, and in her face was a look of horror that helped to tell a story he intended knowing before he left the house that night.

"Play!"

The order was imperious. The little man squatted down on a chair and opened the case on his knees. He

took out an old violin and a bow and cuddled the fiddle under his chin.

Then he began to play, and all the time those animal eyes of his were fixed on Jane Garden's face. He played a queer obbligato and he was extemporising every note. There were moments when he defied every law of harmony, when he became so musically illiterate that Alan, who was no music-lover, winced. There were times when he achieved a breath-taking peak of beauty, when the very soul of humanity trembled on the taut strings of the instrument.

And always he looked at Jane, and it came to Alan Mainford that this man was playing her as though she were a piece of music, translating thought, discordant fear, jarring uncertainty, wild despair, into the terms of melody.

"Play me, ugly man! Leaf her! You hear, play me!"

Madame's voice was an angry wail. It was true then—that was what this ugly little devil was doing—playing souls.

He saw the violinist turn his eyes to the older woman and the pace of the music quickened, became distorted, wild, dreamy and strident. Then, suddenly, in a discord that set Alan's teeth on edge, the music ceased.

"Out of me head!"

The ugly man pronounced his boast loudly. He was pleased with himself, triumphant was the better word. His deep chest swelled, he wiped his streaming forehead with a brightly coloured handkerchief, and the thick lips were unlatched in a grin.

"Out of me head! You're an educated man. I'm self-learnt—but I got more cleverness in me than

you! Next time I say give me a lift, you give it!"

He had become suddenly a bully, overbearing. Alan, who had reason for being annoyed, was amused: for all this bluster was for the benefit of Jane Garden. The little ugly man was showing off.

"I can sing, recite, do a dance," he went on. "I bin before public in real theatres. I can whistle like a bird——"

He pursed his lips and of a sudden there was a blackbird in the room, singing with the joy of life and the unborn spring in its little heart. Alan listened, fascinated.

"No more, you have done well, my dear little friend." Madame arrested a further demonstration. "Here is the money."

She thrust her hand into a bag that hung from her wrist. They heard the jingle of gold and then she held out two sovereigns to the whistler. He accepted the gift with an odd air of condescension: it was as though he was the donor and she the recipient.

"You are a truly great man"—her tone was almost caressing. "Some day you shall be the greatest man in the world. I love you, because you are so ugly and dirty. To-morrow—or on Sunday—I will send for you. Good-bye."

He hesitated, his dark eyes again sought Jane Garden.

"I don't walk back, missus. You ain't going to let a poor old man walk back?"

"I'll give you a lift as far as the city," said Alan, still amused. "I didn't know you were coming to this house or I would have picked you up."

The little man's lips curled in a sneer.

" I daresay you would," he said.

And then Alan caught the girl's eyes, saw the urgency of the summons in them, and went across to her. To his amazement she was breathless, hardly able to speak.

" I want you to get me away from here," she said in a low tone. " Can you—will you ? "

" But how—— ? "

" I don't care how you do it. I know you can't take me away to-night, but can't you send for me to-morrow and give me some instructions about Mrs. Stahm's treatment ? They won't let me go near Sheffield—please ! "

Mainford thought quickly. Both Madame Stahm and Baumgarten were watching him closely. It almost seemed as though they had expected her to approach him.

" I'll send the trap over for you to-morrow, Nurse Garden," he said in a loud voice. " The test won't take very long, and I think that it should——"

" Send the trap over ? " repeated Madame sharply. " Why ? "

He looked at her steadily.

" Because Nurse Garden is not particularly well, and I would like to make a blood test," he said.

" It can be made here," said Baumgarten quickly.

" It will be made just where I want it to be made ! "

Here was the imperious army doctor speaking, authority in his tone.

There was a brief and embarrassing silence.

" I'm afraid I can't spare the nurse," said Madame Stahm acidly, and quailed under Alan Mainford's cold gaze.

He had that effect upon some people; this woman might not be a coward, but she was incapable of resisting authority.

"Is there any reason why she should not go into Sheffield?" he asked.

"None at all," snapped Madame. "But I think a sick patient is entitled to be consulted before a nurse is taken away from her."

Alan smiled.

"You are consulted, Madame Stahm. I will send the trap for this young lady at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon. Either my groom will drive over or my friend Sergeant Eltham, who is an expert driver, will call for her."

It was a threat; nobody in that room mistook the significance of Alan's alternative suggestion. He heard a low grumble behind him, like the growl of an animal, and out of the corner of his eye he saw the little man's face pucker in anger.

"Very good," said Madame Stahm hastily. "There is no reason why the nurse should not go, though it will be very inconvenient. Mr. Baumgarten will pay you your fee, doctor. I shall not require you again."

Alan bowed.

"That is for you to decide, Madame Stahm. But I would advise you, if you have another such attack as you had to-day, not to let your prejudice against me stand in the way of calling me in. You have a very bad heart, but I suppose you know that?"

She glared down at him malignantly from her raised seat.

"It's a lie!" She spoke with difficulty. "I have goot health—goot health! You shall not say that I am sick because I have visions . . . you said this to anger

me ? Tell me, doctor, you said this to anger me, and I will forgive you."

" You have a bad heart," repeated Alan quietly. " Your pulse is not at all as it should be, and you have certain facial symptoms which are rather alarming. I repeat, don't let the fact that I have annoyed you stop you from calling me in if you cannot get another doctor."

He nodded to the girl, made another little bow to Madame Stahm and walked out of the room, followed by Baumgarten. At the door he turned to look back at Jane. She had already disappeared, but the ugly little man had made his way to Madame Stahm's side and was talking to her eagerly in a low voice. She nodded, nodded again, shook her head and smiled.

" Have no fear, little friend," she said. " You shall have all you desire."

As the man came towards them, Baumgarten, with some ostentation, opened a purse which he took from his trouser's pocket and put a golden sovereign and a shilling in Alan's palm.

" That, I think, is a generous fee," he said, a little pompously. And then his voice changed. " Do you think she's ill—yes ? Really, with her heart ? " He tapped his own anxiously.

" I think so," replied Alan.

He was not anxious to discuss the symptoms of his patient with the mysterious Mr. Baumgarten and made his way down the stairs into the dimly lit hall.

" One question, doctor—Do you know a dull, stupid man—a Swiss—who has a factory : the Silver Steel Company, eh ? "

" No," said Alan shortly.

The cob and the trap were standing at the door and

Alan mounted to his seat. He had just taken up the reins when there came a sound that made his blood run cold. It was a long, muffled shriek, that ended in an agonised wail, and it came from somewhere in the house.

"What was that?" he asked quickly.

"It is the railway whistle, my friend," said Baumgarten's voice. He could hardly see him in the darkness. "You are nervous!"

"That was no railway whistle," said Alan, and waited, listening, but the scream was not repeated.

He had forgotten all about the little man until he began clambering up on the opposite side and fell into the more comfortable seat.

"Give me some of that apron, will you?" he growled. "Haven't you got any heart for an old man? . . . Ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Alan unwrapped the driving apron which he had drawn around himself; slipping one of the leather loops round the iron batten at his side, he passed the rest of the cover to his unwelcome passenger. A touch of the reins and the cob was heading down the drive.

He was half annoyed, half amused with himelf. Why on earth had he taken this line with Madame Stahm? He had deliberately tried to frighten her, and he had most certainly antagonised her beyond forgiveness, though this was a matter of no account.

He was amused also to find himself acting in the rôle of champion to distressed nurses, but there was something behind that girl's terror, something peculiarly sinister in the atmosphere of the house. He had not hesitated; the only uneasiness he had in his mind was whether he should leave her there for another night.

All the time he had been in that queer habitation he

had a sense that it was over-tenanted. He was conscious of the presence of men whom he did not see, and had a feeling that strange and unfriendly eyes had watched him all the time he had been there. . . .

That shriek—it was a shriek; it could not have been anything else. Was Mrs. Stahm passing through another hysterical crisis? The little man at his side fidgeted uneasily, grumbling under his breath.

"You've got too much of the apron." He tugged at it savagely. "Do you want to make me ill so as you can cure me? I wouldn't have you for a doctor! I hate the sight of doctors. They go round telling people they're sick when there's nowt wrong with 'em."

"Why did you come out at this hour of the night?" asked Alan, ignoring the abuse. "Is it a practice of yours?"

"Mind your own business," snarled the other. "I go out any hour of the night I like—do you see?"

"If you're not civil I'll stop the trap and throw you out," said Alan angrily.

"It'd take a better man than you——" began the other, when the young doctor pulled his horse to a standstill.

"Get out and walk," he said curtly.

"See this?"

The little man stretched out his arm. In the re-reflected light of the lamp Alan saw, dangling from his wrist, a snub-nosed revolver, evidently fastened by a strap to his wrist.

"That's a shooter, young man. You know what a shooter is—hold hard, don't hit!"

He had seen Alan's hand go back, and the bullying tone became suddenly a supplicating whine.

" You wouldn't hit an old man, would you ? Mind you, I could throw you out of this trap as easy as cutting butter ! But I don't want to get into any trouble with you or with anybody else. I'm an old man, and all I want is peace and quietness."

" Then sit quiet," said Alan savagely.

He flung the apron back over the man's knees and tchk-ed to the cob.

" And shut your mouth," he added.

The latter injunction was instantly disobeyed.

" I don't wonder you're surprised seeing me here," said the little man. " But I go out when I'm sent for. And they send for me all hours of the day and night—women ! They take a liking to me—they go off their heads about me. There was a girl in Sheffield——"

He told a story to which Alan found it difficult to listen with patience.

" Madame is a lady bred and born," he went on. " That woman knows me better than I know myself. I heard what you said, mister—I play her ! I can play anybody ! I see inside 'em and put it into the fiddle. There ain't another man in England could do that. There ain't another man in England who can recite like I can recite. I've been on the stage."

He went on in this strain for ten minutes, and then abruptly broke off and asked :

" What do you think of my girl ? "

" Your girl ? "

" That's what I said," said the other ; " the young nurse lady ; the one you're going to operate on to-morrow."

" I'm not operating on anybody to-morrow, but if you mean the nurse, will you explain what you mean by ' your girl ' ? " asked Alan in a cold fury.

The little man chuckled continuously, beating his knees in the ecstasy of his humour.

" She'll be mine," he said at last. " I don't say she is at the minute. Notice her looking at me as if I was a snake ? I've seen dozens of 'em do that, and how have they ended up ? "

" I don't particularly want to know," said Alan.

But his passenger could not be snubbed.

" There's a lady bred and born coming to live near me. Her husband's a gentleman, but she's coming to live next door to me, and for why ? Because she's off her head about me—and a lady ! You ought to see her, mister—young——" He smacked his lips and became physically descriptive.

Alan was not easily revolted. He was not revolted even now. He listened with a sort of resentful amazement to the boasting of this little blackguard, and if once or twice he had the temptation to hit him on the head with the butt of his whip he restrained himself.

" Where do you work ? " he asked, more to turn the conversation than to elicit the information.

" Work ? What—me ? I'm a master man. I don't work for nobody. I'm independent. I can earn my living in a dozen ways. My wood-carving is better than any wood-carving you've ever seen. I can frame pictures, I can make a cabinet—there's nothing I couldn't do. Some of these lah-de-da-dy swells in Sheffield think they're clever, but I've forgot more than they knew. You're not going to drop me here, are you ? "

Alan pulled up the cob before his house.

" Take me on to Darnell, mister : it's only a couple of miles."

"Walk," said Alan laconically.

"I'm an old man," wailed his dogged passenger. "You wouldn't let an old man walk through the slush and the snow on a night like this? It's not human!"

"You're not human either. Get down!"

Out of the shadow of the porch before Alan's house came a burly figure.

"Hullo, doctor! You're the man I wanted to see."

It was Sergeant Eltham, and at the sound of his voice the little man slipped from the trap on the offside and vanished into the night.

"Thought you had somebody with you? He went quickly enough—not so quick that I didn't see him," said Sergeant Eltham. "What kind of persons are you picking up at night, doctor?"

"Do you know him?" asked Alan, in surprise.

"Know him?" scoffed Baldy. "I should say I did know him! The cleverest burglar in the north of England, the nastiest little brute in the world."

"What is his name?" asked Alan, suspecting another demonstration of Baldy's weakness, but for once Sergeant Eltham had the name on the tip of his tongue and could pronounce it.

"His name is Charles Peace," he said.

CHAPTER IV

CHARLES PEACE? The name meant nothing to Dr. Mainford.

"He's certainly a nasty fellow. Come in and have some coffee. What are you doing out in the middle of the night?"

"I'll tell you later."

The sergeant stopped to stamp the snow from his feet on the doorstep, and heaved a sigh of relief as he came into the snug warmth of Alan's study.

"Have a look to see that you haven't lost your watch," he said. "Peace is as good a pickpocket as he is a burglar. There's nothing he can't do, from shove-ha'penny to murder. Did he give you any trouble?"

Alan laughed.

"A little bit," he said. "I nearly threw him out of the trap."

"I'm glad you didn't try." Baldy was very serious. "That man has got the strength of ten. I went for him once in Sheffield, and it took seven policemen to get him to the station, and then we had to frog-march him."

Alan was not convinced.

"He didn't give me that impression. He showed me a revolver when I threatened him.

"A revolver, eh?" said the other quickly. "By gum, I wish I'd known that, I'd have pinched him. I've always heard he carried a pistol, but I never found one on him. How did you come to meet him?"

Briefly Alan told the story of his visit to Madame Stahm, though he made no reference to the beautiful nurse or to the shriek he had heard. When he had finished, Baldy nodded.

"Yes, I know all about his fiddle playing. Personally, I know nothing about music and harmony, but I'm told he plays well enough to go on the stage. In fact, he has been on the stage. Did he tell you anything about wild beasts?"

"Wild beasts?" repeated the startled young doctor. "Is he an animal tamer, too?" he asked ironically.

To his surprise Baldy nodded.

"He can tame wild elephants! I've seen him go into a lions' den at Wombwell's menagerie and take a bone from under the nose of a lion. His father was in the animal training business, and so was Peace—that's why he's a good burglar: dogs never bark at him."

"Are you serious?" asked Alan, pausing as he poured out the coffee which the sleepy-eyed Dixon had brought in.

"It's the truth," said Sergeant Eltham. "Dogs never bark at Peace. You can get the most savage retriever and chain him in a kennel outside your door, and Peace will come in in the middle of the night, pat the dog and send him back to sleep. He plays the piano—in fact, there's nothing he can't do in the musical line. And they tell me he can make up poetry."

Out of curiosity Alan repeated some of the man's boasts of conquests, and was amazed when Baldy confirmed the little man's claims.

"You wouldn't think it possible, but it's a fact. I could tell you some pretty bad cases—decent women who've left their homes for him. He's lame—did you

notice that ? And one of his fingers was shot off when he was a boy, and his face—good Lord ! Well, you've seen him ! "

" He's a pretty old man, isn't he ? "

Baldy shook his head.

" No, sir. Peace can't be much more than forty-three. He looks seventy, but round about forty is his real age. Did he cry to you about being a poor old man ? He always does."

He told Alan something of the man's record. He had started as a pickpocket, gone on to be a burglar.

" I pinched him twenty years ago, when he burgled a house in this city. He got a stretch of four years, but that wasn't his first conviction. He got one dose of six years at Manchester, and then went back and got another. In fact, he knows more prisons than any bad character I've ever met with."

Alan listened, fascinated.

" He's been out three years now," explained Baldy in answer to his question. " I don't often see him, except when I'm making inquiries about a job, and then he's got an alibi tied to his left ear ! Funny you met him to-night. What was he doing at Mrs. Stahm's ? That's the puzzle."

The sergeant ran his fingers through his long beard.

" She's very kind and charitable, by all accounts. I think somebody ought to see her and warn her."

Alan shook his head.

" I don't think that's necessary," he said quietly. " Madame Stahm has a pretty good idea of the kind of man he is. Now, tell me what you want to see me about."

Baldy sat for a little while, ordering his brief narrative.

"Do you remember that fellow I spoke to you about —the foreigner, who disappeared from the Silver Gilt works?"

"Silver Steel," suggested Alan.

Sergeant Eltham brushed aside the correction impatiently.

"Whatever it is. Well, it appears he hasn't turned up in Switzerland. His relations have written to Mr. What's-his-name——"

"Wertheimer?"

"That's the feller—asking for the allowance he used to make to his sister. What's more, the first man that ran away hasn't been seen at his home since he disappeared from Sheffield. I've got a few facts about the business that you might like to know, doctor. You've been a good friend of mine, and your brain and education have helped me when I've been stuck before."

He opened his book, turned the leaves slowly to refresh his memory, closed the book and slipped it in his pocket, and began.

"Over in Switzerland there was a man, whose name I can't exactly remember and can't read, who got an idea he could make steel that wouldn't rust. Which, on the face of it, is absurd and ridiculous. This Professor What's-his-name had a lab—what's the word? It begins with an 'l'."

"Laboratory?" suggested Alan.

The sergeant nodded.

"That's the thing. He was pretty high up in science and he built or borrowed or rented this lab.—the word you said—and got a lot of young professors to come in and help him. They didn't quite make what they were looking for, but they got near enough to it

for them to see that they were near the secret. Then one of the young men who were helping the old man bolted to America, and took away with him all the papers and calculations and the likes of that, thinking that he could invent the thing himself and get all the money there was for inventing it."

A light dawned on Alan Mainford.

"Is the professor alive?" he asked.

"No," said Baldy. "This feller running away so much upset the old man, Professor What's-his-name, that he took sick and died. Another assistant carried on the work, but the widow of the professor was so suspicious that she kicked him out, and he came to England and started experimenting on his own. That is the man at the Silver Steel works."

"Wertheimer?"

"That's him, Wertheimer. In the meantime the feller that went away to America and opened a sort of lab.—whatever it is—on his own, died. The man at the Silver Steel works heard about this, sent to America and brought over two or three of the head men who had been working for the American fellow, and two out of the three have already disappeared. Wertheimer (don't say I can't remember names) is very upset about it, because he was sure that both these men had the secret of the new steel, and would have worked it out for him if they had remained. What is worrying him is that they may have gone over to this very woman you're speaking about."

"Madame Stahm? Why, of course. Eckhardt was the man who ran away——"

"That's his name," said Baldy, as triumphantly as though he had himself remembered it. "Eckhardt!"

And Wertheimer was the dull, stupid man about whom he had been questioned.

"I'm going to drive over to see the lady to-morrow," Baldy went on, "and I was wondering if you could lend me your trap."

"I'll lend you my trap, and you can bring back the nurse who is there, a Miss Jane Garden," said Alan quickly. "Have any inquiries been made at Dibdens, where Mrs. Stahm is having her experiments made?"

Baldy nodded.

"Yes, according to Mr.—the Silver Steel man—he's been into that. He's had a chat with Mr. Dibden himself, and neither of the two men are employed at the works. My own theory is that they've gone off with girls—they're foreigners, and naturally they run after women."

"I know a few Englishmen who do that," said Alan dryly. "Your friend Peace——"

"Don't call him my friend." Baldy raised his voice protestingly. "There's a dirty little skunk if you like! I remember once he fell into the river: he couldn't swim, but, bless your heart, I said to the people on the bank: 'Don't worry about him: he's born to be hung, and a man who's born to be hung can never be drowned.' It's a funny thing—have you ever noticed it as a medical man?"

"I can't say that I have," said Alan, yawning. "But I still don't know why you go out in the middle of the night to pursue these inquiries of yours."

"The Silver Steel man came round and knocked me up. I've been with him for two hours, and I was so wide awake when he'd gone that I popped round to see if there was a light in the surgery."

Alan dozed off that morning with an uneasy consciousness that there was a vital something that he had forgotten to tell the sergeant. In the first hour of waking he realised that that something was—the scream in the night.

CHAPTER V

BAUMGARTEN waited until the sound of the trap wheels had passed beyond his hearing, closed the half-open door through which he had watched the departure, and went swiftly upstairs to Madame Stahm. Madame was alone; she had dismissed the nurse, and was half sitting, half reclining in her big throne chair. She saw something in the man's face that brought her bolt upright.

"What is wrong?" she asked.

"Did you hear it?" His black eyebrows made an inquiring arch. "If you did not, our doctor did."

"Lamonte?"

"The ventilator must have been left open. I will go and see. To-morrow we shall have the police here, and that will be extremely awkward."

She was galvanised to life by the words and came instantly to her feet.

"The police?" she said shrilly. "You are mad! And if they come it will be your fault. You are careless, Peter."

He said no word, but, passing down into the hall, took the lantern from the table and descended a flight of stone stairs, through an underground kitchen and along a passage, the end of which was barred by

an ironclad door. He unlocked this; beyond was a chamber that had once been a wine cellar, a large, low-vaulted room, lined with iron shelves. He stopped here to light a gas bracket and went on through another door to a smaller cellar.

It was part of a much older building. The stone-vaulted roofs were supported on pillars that seemed over-massive in that confined space. Again he lit a gas bracket and looked round. A table, a chair and a bed practically comprised the furnishing of the room. On the bed lay a man, and from beneath the blanket ran a thin, steel chain which was fastened to a staple in the wall.

The man on the bed lay on his back, his white, disfigured face upturned. He glared at Baumgarten as he approached.

"Why did you make that noise, you pig?" demanded Baumgarten without heat.

The man blinked at him.

"I am cold, and there are rats here," he said thickly. "I must have been dreaming."

He stretched out his hand, took a mug of water from the table and drank eagerly, supporting himself on his elbow.

"It is very cold," he said again. "You must give me some more blankets."

"I will give you something else to warm you." Baumgarten showed his white teeth in a smile from which mirth was absent. "You are fortunate to be alive, my breaker of oaths!"

The man on the bed passed his thin hand over his face wearily, and turned on his side.

"I took no oaths; I am not a traitor," he said. "I was little more than a workman—you know that,

Herr Baumgarten. It is true that I worked for Eckhardt, but would Eckhardt give me any of his secrets? It is true that I worked for Wertheimer, but does he tell me his formula? A hundred and fifty francs a week, Herr Baumgarten—that is my salary. Is it the pay of a genius to whom you trust formulas?"

"You're a liar," said Baumgarten dispassionately. "Every month you sent a thousand francs to your bank in Lausanne. We shall make you talk, my friend."

The face of Lamonte puckered with rage.

"Your whip—no Some day I shall talk, Baumgarten, before an English judge—and I shall tell them of the man who was here before, and who left a message written on the wall . . . ah, you did not know that. Where is he—you devil!"

Suddenly he leaped from the bed. Baumgarten had just time to throw himself out of reach before the chain about the man's ankles caught him and flung him to the stone floor.

Peter Baumgarten was no coward. He could meet violence with violence, but this news the man had given him threw him off his balance.

"My friend, you had him here; what did you do with him?" screamed the prisoner, straining at the chain. "You murdered him—you and that hag! I will have you on the scaffold with a rope round your necks!"

"Your friend is in Switzerland." Baumgarten was practically breathless, panic-stricken by the discovery of his secret. "He was very foolish; he could have had a lot of money. Instead, he preferred to be a traitor."

"He is dead," wailed Lamonte.

" He is alive—I swear it. He went from here a very sick man, but he is alive."

Here he spoke the truth, for the prisoner this cell had held was alive and on the Continent in the mental hospital for which his sufferings had qualified him.

" Go back to bed. Be sensible. We have not hurt you. What is a little whip ? You are the better for it. Tell us all that Eckhardt told you, and you will be a rich man and free."

The man crawled back to bed with a groan and pulled the blankets over him.

" I know nothing, I can tell nothing," he said.

Baumgarten went out, extinguished the light and locked the doors behind him. He found Madame sitting as he had left her.

" Well ? " she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

" I am worried about this man. His mentality is stronger. We cannot present him to the alienist and say : ' His mind is deranged ; do not believe anything he says.' "

" He may die," she said indifferently.

" I hope not."

Baumgarten's voice was curt, emphatic.

" What use is it to you or to me, Clarice, if we have millions in our hands, and after be locked up behind an iron door, with an English judge eating his eggs and bacon and saying : ' I think I will send these people to the gallows to-day,' *hein?* That is no end for a gentleman ! All the money in the world is not worth it. We have already gone too far, spent too much, chasing this miracle dream of ours."

" You're a fool, too," she snapped. And then, after a moment's thought : " The little man would kill him."

" Peace ? " He laughed. " You do not know that man, madame ! He could not kill Lamonte—he must dramatise his every action. If Lamonte were part of a drama—yes. But if you took him down to a cold cellar and said : ' Kill this man,' he would be horrified. He is highly moral, a little religious."

She stared at him in amazement.

" Peace I am talking about," she said.

He nodded.

" That is Peace. I mean, this dirty little man has a peculiar moral standard. Strange that you have not noticed that. It is the standard of sentiment, a little elastic, but very real. And yet, he is loathsome ; and I feel that I could put my foot on him every time I see him."

She smiled to herself.

" He is very admirable. Some day he will be very useful."

" To calm your nerves ? " He could not resist the sneer.

" To save us all," she replied.

CHAPTER VI

WHILE Alan was shaving next morning, he sent Dixon round to find the police officer, but Baldy was out on one of those mysterious missions which made up his life. He would see him later in the day, when he brought Jane Garden back ; and here a new train of thought started.

Jane Garden was a problem which had to be solved, and the solution of this particular difficulty did not immediately present itself.

This ugly burglar Peace had excited his curiosity and interest, and these were big enough to overcome the natural revulsion he felt towards the man. He was something of a humanist, and had all the detachment of the scientific observer. He could regard the little man as foul beyond tolerance, and yet could find the same interest in him as he discovered in the obscure diseases which came under his notice at rare intervals.

Alan, despite his youth, had retained and enlarged the practice of the old doctor from whose executors he had acquired it. In the main it was an upper middle-class clientèle, and none of these could be expected to give a first-hand impression of the little nondescript. It was not until he began his charity calls in the poorer suburbs that he learned that Peace was quite a well-known character, had a reputation none too savoury, but on the whole was reluctantly admired by his law-abiding friends and neighbours.

Peace himself lived in a poor class district, and was

by all accounts a great lover of animals: his canaries and parrots were famous in the neighbourhood. He was believed to be a man of superior education, and was credited with gifts to which, to Alan personally, he had made no claim.

If these poor people looked askance at him at all, their distrust was based on other causes than his anti-social activities. There were mothers of daughters who did not call his name blessed; but if he was hated in such quarters as these he was also feared. Alan confirmed the stories of his extraordinary strength. He was a frequent attraction at local sing-songs, and was believed to have not only written his own lyrics but composed the music.

Nobody loved him; nobody even liked him; the most that could be said of him was that he was respected. Hereabouts his boastfulness was not regarded as such, but rather as a statement of fact offered by the only person who could be an authority.

By a coincidence, Alan came upon some of his handiwork: a wooden crucifix, carved from cedar, and, despite certain crudities, a beautiful piece of work. In another house the mention of the man's name produced an ingenious mechanical toy, which he had made for a child. Alan had a chat with a doctor who did most of his work amongst this particular class.

"A terrible little beast," said the other medico, and, speaking as doctor to doctor, he explained why. "He's done time, too, but his neighbours don't know that."

"Would it make any difference?" asked Alan, and to his surprise the other doctor was emphatic.

"Good heavens, yes! The respectable poor are

terribly proper, and would have nothing to do with a man who'd been in the jug, as they call it."

Alan was again to hear of Peace, for when he got back from his afternoon calls, which he did on foot, since he had lent the cob and the trap to Baldy, he found that gentleman waiting for him.

"I've brought the young lady. She's gone upstairs to her room—is she staying here?"

"For a little while."

Alan had made this eleventh-hour arrangement with his housekeeper, and had scrawled a hurried note to the girl telling her his plans.

"A very nice young person," said Baldy. "Very nice. That Madame What's-her-name wasn't too pleased to see me, doctor, although she seemed to be expecting me."

Alan started guiltily.

"Good heavens, yes! I'd forgotten that I half threatened her with you—at least, I said I'd probably send you out to bring back Nurse Garden. The spirit of prophecy was on me, Baldy!"

Sergeant Eltham closed his eyes in resignation.

"Don't call me Baldy," he murmured.

"Sorry. She wasn't pleased to see you, eh? What do you think of her?"

Baldy pursed his bearded lips.

"She may be, and she may not be," he said cryptically. "I'm not sure. She must have been a fine woman when she was young, but, of course, she's a foreigner, and that makes all the difference. She's got a rough side to her tongue, doctor; when I started inquiring about the missing men she let me have it in French, German, Russian, Eyetalian, Spanish and Chinese—at least, that's what it sounded like. When

she got back to English she started to tell me what she was going to do when she saw my superintendent. Naturally, I shook in my shoes: I always do when I'm threatened."

"Whom did you see?" asked Alan curiously. "Baumgarten?"

"I wouldn't remember the names even if I'd heard 'em," confessed Baldy. "I saw a couple of men-servants, and tough-looking customers they were. And, of course, I saw the lady and the nurse, but I didn't see her till I was going. And I saw three or four rough-looking loafers walking about the grounds. They might have been gardeners, but they didn't look like it. Well, the long and the short of it is, doctor, she knows nothing about the missing men, and has never employed them. She said Mr. What's-his-name of the Silver Steel Company was a thief and a dull man and other abusive epitaphs——"

"Epithets," suggested Alan.

"Well, whatever it is. Rum-looking woman, not my idea of something to come home to. I saw that other woman this morning—the farmer's wife, Mrs. How-d'you-call-him—the woman who saw the fight the day the man disappeared. She said one of the men who was talking to this young feller on the night that he disappeared was a little man with an ugly face. Recognise the description?"

"You mean Peace?"

Baldy nodded.

"I'm taking her round to-night to see if she can identify him. Of course, Peace will swear he wasn't anywhere near the spot—he's the man who invented alibis. He's poisonous."

He took his leave soon after to go in search of the

farmer's wife. Mrs. Haggerty, the housekeeper, had laid tea and had brought in the pot and the muffin dish when Jane Garden came down the narrow staircase through the hall and into the little study.

Alan looked at her and gasped. She wore a dark, closely-fitting taffeta dress, with a little white lace collar, and her deep gold hair was uncovered. Beauty sometimes owes some of its quality to the frame in which it is set. Alan always said that a nurse who was not pretty in uniform must be very plain without; but the radiant beauty of this girl was enhanced by the severity of her "civilian" attire.

There was a new light in her eyes; her face was transformed. The haggard fear which had sat on her on the previous night had departed, and there was now an assurance in her poise and a radiance in the smile that parted her red lips.

"Well, doctor, you certainly got me away! What are you going to do with me?" she said almost gaily.

"You're not going back to Madame Stahm's?"

She shook her head.

"Never," she said emphatically. "I may return to London; I expect the institution that sent me will be very angry that I left Madame in a hurry, but I must risk that. Is there no place in Yorkshire where I could find work?"

"Must you work?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Yes," she said quietly. "I have to earn my living, and it's the only way I know."

She sat down and, at his invitation, began pouring out the tea.

"What was the trouble at Brinley Hall?" he asked.

She did not reply immediately. She handed him his cup, sliced a muffin upon his plate, and then :

" Everything," she said. " The atmosphere was terrible—sinister. That's a dramatic word, but I can't think of anything better. And all those dreadful men . . ."

" Are there many there ? "

She hesitated.

" About ten, I think," she said, to his surprise. " Madame Stahm has a private laboratory in the grounds. Some of them work there, some of them are servants ; one is always meeting them in the house, and they're rather—well, embarrassing."

" Baumgarten—what of him ? "

She dropped her eyes quickly.

" I don't know. He's not very nice—rather friendly —too friendly—and he's absolutely all-powerful there ; he rules the house and rules Madame Stahm, although he pretends all the time that he's a sort of upper servant. Actually he is her secretary. I don't know what correspondence she has, but he seems to be with her all the time, except when that horrid little man Peace is there——"

" Does he come often ? " asked Alan quickly.

" Very often. He's an amazing little creature, isn't he ? I confess that the sight of him makes me sick here "—she laid her hand on her diaphragm. " He's the only man in the world I couldn't be alone with without screaming. But Madame Stahm is never tired of him, says he's a genius—' God-gifted ' is her word. What makes him more terrible is the delusion he seems to hold that he is irresistible to all women."

She gave a little shiver, and her pretty face puckered into a grimace.

"He must belong to absolutely the lowest grade of mankind. I've seen the type in hospitals, but never quite so bad as he. His face in itself is extraordinary. He can make it change so that you would never recognise it—from hideous to more hideous!"

And then her sense of humour overcame her disgust, and she laughed softly.

"He asked if he might take me out one afternoon."

"Asked whom?" demanded Alan, aghast.

"Madame Stahm—and she gave permission! Not immediately, but in the future. She told me it was one of the rewards she was holding out to the little man, and practically commanded me to grant his request. I told her I would sooner go walking with a large family of snakes, but that only seemed to amuse her."

"He goes there very often, does he?" said Alan thoughtfully. "That will be news to Baldy."

"Who is Baldy? Oh, you mean Sergeant Eltham? Isn't he wonderful? He must have pointed out fifty people or places on the way back, and didn't know the name of any! Am I staying here to-night?"

"Yes. It's quite proper," said Alan hastily. "My housekeeper sleeps on the premises——"

"Don't be silly," she interrupted. "I'm supposed to be a trained nurse, and I've been alone in a house all night with a lunatic!"

Usually Alan Mainford took his time when he made his evening calls, but this night he found himself hurrying one after the other, skipping unimportant cases where ordinarily he would have called if only to gossip, and he was back in the house within an hour, and found, to his disappointment, that she was just going to bed.

"And I'll sleep well to-night. No screams——"

"Screams?" he said quickly. "What do you mean?"

She was annoyed with herself.

"I shouldn't have said that. But there were screams—hideous noises sometimes. I thought it was Madame Stahm shouting in her sleep, but once I heard it when I was talking with her, and she was so agitated that I knew she had heard the sound before."

"What did she do?" asked Alan.

"She sent for Baumgarten and talked to him vigorously in Russian; and when I say 'vigorously' I mean—vigorously! The night you left—you heard it?"

He nodded.

"It was dreadful, wasn't it? It made my blood run cold."

She was looking a little white and peaked again, and Alan summarily ordered her off to bed He sat for a long time turning in his mind the problem of Madame Stahm, weaving about her the most fantastic theories, none of which was perhaps as fantastic as the truth.

Thought passed quickly to dream. Alan jerked up his head with a start, and was conscious of coldness. The fire was out; the clock on the mantelpiece pointed to half-past two. With a yawn he walked upstairs, opened the door of his room, and stepped in. A soft voice from the darkness said:

"Is this your room, doctor? I'm so sorry."

With an incoherent apology he shut the door and went into the back room that his housekeeper had prepared for him.

He carried his embarrassment into his dreams.

CHAPTER VII

AT Brinley Hall Madame Stahm sat at a black-lacquered table, resting her elbows on its polished surface, her long chin in the palm of her hand. At the far end of the table Baumgarten half sat, half sprawled.

"Twelve o'clock. The doctor's cart was to bring her back."

Madame Stahm spoke in Russian.

Baumgarten sat up and stretched, flicked a speck from his immaculate evening coat and yawned.

"And I, my dear Clarice, told you that she would never come back."

A deep frown gathered on Madame's brow.

"Another spy to combat," she said, her eyes glowering. "And a woman! They are the worst!"

Baumgarten yawned again.

"She is no spy. She is frightened, partly of the beast, partly of the noises, but mainly of the beast, I think. You were very stupid to let her see him."

Madame shrugged.

"She is a spy; she has been listening at doors. I have found her in my bureau when she was not supposed to be there. If she does not come back——" She looked at the jewelled watch that lay on the table before her.

"She will not come back—have no fear."

"She could have sent a message——" began the woman.

"The doctor could have sent the message, but he did not. We are a long way out. If these barbarians

had telephones we could speak to Sheffield. To be sure, I will myself go to the doctor, but I know exactly what he will tell me—that he has taken a blood test of the beautiful nurse and that she is unable to continue her work for a week or two."

Madame Stahm brooded for ten minutes.

"I did not send for her——" she began.

"I sent for her, yes," said Baumgarten calmly. "If you die without medical attention, what will people say? They will say: 'Baumgarten, to whom this dear, good lady has left all her money, must have poisoned her.' The English are ready to believe anything of foreigners."

Again that brooding silence.

"The little man would bring her back," she said.

Mr. Baumgarten smiled, and stroked his long face reflectively.

"Indeed? You overrate the beast. He can do many things; he is very strong, cunning and wicked. I myself have never met a worse man. He can play divinely and bring you out of your tantrums, Clarice, and that in itself is wonderful. He can do other things that require violence. How shall he bring the girl here? Shall he hit her on the head, lift her into a wagonette, and will your doctor do nothing? Beware of that young man, Clarice. He is clever and he is a soldier. Mr. Dibden, who knows him, tells me he is the cleverest revolver shot in the country. Also he has killed his man. That to me is very important. Kill one—the rest are so easy, even though the one be a marauding Somali. Also he heard the noise."

She shrugged.

"So you said."

"I told you the truth," said Baumgarten coolly,

" because I could not afford to have another night of nerves and screamings and teeth-grindings. I did not emphasise the fact, but he heard."

Another ten minutes passed by, the silence broken only by the periodical puffs of his cigar.

" Was there any result ? " she asked.

He shook his head.

" The result was negative—for the moment. I am not so sure that Lamonte knows nothing. He was with Eckhardt in America. One thing he told us, and that is important, that Eckhardt had a friend in Cleveland, an engineer, a man who is now in Yorkshire, and has been in communication with Wertheimer. Eckhardt and this man spent many evenings together, especially when Eckhardt was ill. This gentleman is an engineer by profession and a draughtsman. He took notes. He is apparently the kind of man who would take notes methodically. Also—and this I learned from our friend—Dyson (which is his name) has offered to help Wertheimer on certain conditions which that treacherous dog has not granted. He could only bargain if he had something to bargain with. Also certain observers of mine, who have shadowed him, say that Dyson boasts that he has in his narrow head a secret that would revolutionise the world. That can only be the formula."

" Is it possible to get his notes ? " asked Madame Stahm. " Who is this man ? What does he do for a living ? Where does he work ? "

Baumgarten sighed wearily.

" I have told you a hundred times, Clarice, that you are so not of this world that you refuse to hear me. He is an engineer ; his name is Dyson ; he lived or worked in Cleveland, Ohio——"

"But if he has the documents they can be found."

Her voice had risen to a shrill treble, a certain symptom of her growing excitement, which the man did not fail to notice.

"If you keep calm and quiet I will tell you more, but if you are going to scream and clench your hands and be mystic, I am going to bed."

She was breathing deeply through her nose, and that, too, was symptomatic of the grip she had taken on herself.

"It is a waste of time to find his notes if he carries the vital information here." Baumgarten tapped his forehead. "We are prepared to make him an offer, I suppose?"

"Of course," impatiently. "What are you doing about this, Peter?"

He shrugged his shapely shoulders.

"I don't know. It is all in the realms of conjecture. Dyson has a very charming wife, a pretty woman who drinks a little—which means she has vulgar tastes. She is a woman, I should imagine, on whom the beast would make a great impression."

A look of disgust wrinkled Madame Stahm's face.

"Ach! Who but you would think that, Peter?"

"You might," he said calmly. "I am paying compliments to your little horror—you should be grateful to me! Always he tells me that he is attractive to women, and I believe him. There are stories about him in the city. I speak often with the workmen, and I have discussed him. Your little man is irresistible."

She struck the table with the flat of her palm.

"Bring him now," she said imperiously. "Let him

be sent for. Have the horses harnessed in the victoria, and let him be brought at once."

There was an amused look in the tired eyes of the Russian.

"*Manana!*" he said. "To-morrow is also a day, beloved."

He rose from the table and stretched himself, his arms outflung tautly.

"I don't like your doctor—he is too intelligent, and he doesn't like me, which is unfortunate. He will give you trouble, especially if the nurse arouses him. He is in love with her.

"*Glouposti!*"

"It is not rubbish," said Baumgarten.

He walked behind her, dropped his hands on her thin shoulders and swayed her to and fro.

"Beloved, while there is money left shall we go back to a country of clean snow and blue skies? These English are a peculiarly unimaginative people. They hang men rather too readily, and women too. They have no emotion, no sentiment, no romance. Think of it, Clarice—in a day and a night we could be in the shadow of the Matterhorn!"

"Never!" she stormed. "Never! Until I recover the work of John Stahm's life, and the secret they stole from him, I will never rest. If you are too soft for this work, go, Peter. I am not afraid of prisons and ropes. I will go on to the end."

"Very well." Baumgarten was calmness itself. "If you stay, I must, for I adore you! I will do as you desire—everything, except engage myself to work with the nasty little man. There I cry 'Never!' He offends me, socially and æsthetically. There is nothing in him that is not—what is the English word? They

have a fine one—ah, squalid. He is squalor, he is foul, he is something to be decently burnt and turned into clean ashes."

He heard her low, amused laugh.

"He is divine," she said, with a little gurgle of laughter, "beyond price. Also extraordinarily useful, Peter, as you have proved. He may be more useful yet."

In the morning Baumgarten sent a messenger to Peace. He was not at home; he had left on the previous night for Manchester, a city in which he took a very great interest, though it had sent him to penal servitude for twelve years. None the less, the lure of the cotton city never failed. In every moment of financial crisis Manchester was the city.

Charles Peace limped to the railway station, took a third-class ticket to the northern city, and spent a profitable and instructive two hours of the journey arguing theology. For Charles Peace held strong and orthodox views, though it was his boast that he believed in God and the devil but feared neither.

He went away with the amount of his return fare and a golden sovereign in his pocket; he came back with a small bag filled with miscellaneous articles, some of which he put into the fire. Most precious of all the loot was a new and beautifully fitted concertina, and throughout the day of his return his neighbours heard strange melodies issue from the Peace house, for he was improvising a hymn, making up the lyric as he went along. It was all about love and heaven and beautiful white angels, and dear little children waiting to receive their earthly parents. Mr. Peace had lost a child; it had been born and died whilst he was in prison. But to him it was a dream child, surprising and dazzlingly lovely. He often wept over the baby

he had never seen, and composed poetry about him ; for he was a sentimentalist and easily moved by a vision of angels playing harps. He himself was always on the look-out for a harp, for he was certain he would excel upon it, but never found one.

" There's no instrument I can't play," was his boast.

Since there was no harp, a concertina was an effective substitute.

When he sat back in the chair tilted against the kitchen wall, manipulating the keys under his fingers, his eyes closed dreamily, he could almost imagine harp-like qualities in the wailing harmonies that the little leather bellows blew.

. . . . . .

" I value that concertina," the owner of the burgled house was telling a sympathetic policeman. " I paid a lot of money for it."

" Have you lost anything else ? " asked the police officer.

The other compiled a list of spoons, clocks and portable silverware. Mr. Peace could have compiled a fuller list and have claimed greater accuracy, for all the articles which had been lost lay snug in the coal cellar, and that night would be fenced for a tenth of their value.

He had no friends, this lone wolf. His dowdy wife feared him ; his stepson hated him ; the child of his marriage was petrified in his presence. He had a quick and heavy hand for wife or child, though he could be generous. Sometimes he would be unaccountably flush with money ; golden sovereigns would jingle in his pockets ; the bar of his favourite public-house would yield him a sycophantic audience.

"There's no instrument I couldn't play, sitha. Piano? I can an' all. Trumpet, bugle, organ——"

"Harp?" suggested somebody at random.

The ugly face grew uglier.

"We'll say nowt about religion, lad. I'm religious."

He was particularly religious at that moment, for he had escaped arrest by the skin of his teeth, and by luck was without his six-shooter.

Subsequently he told a chaplain that he ascribed his escape from justice to a direct answer to prayer. He prayed for things and got them, he said, and related how he once paid his addresses to a sweetheart, who had received them coldly, and after an evening spent in supplication he had changed her attitude to him in twenty-four hours.

Madame Stahm, who never prayed, sent for her faithful servant, and he, hiring a car, drove out to her in the dark of the night, smoking a cigar which was wholly distasteful to him, but which seemed consistent with his importance.

A plain clothes man saw him as he left the outskirts of the city, and reported his movements to headquarters on a dial telegraph. Baldy, who was at the station, took the report and sniffed at it.

"Let him go," he said. "If there's any burglary in that direction, pull him in, and ask the patrol to pick him up on his return."

Baldy Eltham was taking an unusual interest in his pet abomination. Curiously enough, Peace at that moment was especially interested in Sergeant Eltham.

CHAPTER VIII

A REMARKABLE woman was Madame Stahm. She was indefatigable, tireless. Baumgarten, who, curiously enough, never spoke good German, called her the *Wonderfrau*. She could live on the minimum of sleep ; she ate no more than would have kept a canary alive ; and, except for these hysterical outbreaks of hers, did not know a day's sickness. She had an unusual knowledge of mechanics, was a particularly brilliant chemist, though she had taken no degree in the subject, and during her married life had acquired some of her husband's uncanny instinct which is nine-tenths of inspiration.

She was a wealthy woman, too, could afford, as Baumgarten reminded her at frequent intervals, to drop this quest of hers and, retiring, live an amusing and comfortable life. But the attainment of the goal which her husband had set forth to reach was her life's passion. Without it, life could have no meaning.

Her interest in Peace was no affectation. There was in her a leaning towards the bizarre, and there was this creditable factor in her perversity, that she saw through the ugly coating of things and detected quantities which were hidden from the normal eye.

" Dirt ? Show me dirt, and I will show you the most delightful chemical constituents," was her favourite saying.

Baumgarten was a man of vision, but could never see, in the slouching little man with the repulsive face, more than something slightly removed from the baser

form of animal life. He conceded to him a genius for music, for Baumgarten was not musical, and he was fair. For all he knew, the little man was a prodigy.

He received Peace in the bare ante-room that led off the square stone hall, and the visitor came in, rubbing his mittened hands.

"It's cold here," he croaked. "Ain't you got a fire here anywhere?"

"Attend to me!"

Baumgarten barked the words. He never attempted to disguise his antipathy to the man he employed.

"Madame wishes to ask you questions and to give you some work. You may earn ten or twenty pounds —more than you will ever make from a burglary."

Peace scowled at him.

"I don't know what you mean by burglary. That's a nice word to use to a respectable man, I must say! I wouldn't have come out if I thought you was going to jaw me! Twenty pounds! A friend of mine makes hundreds—thousands!"

He carried under his arm a bundle wrapped in a piece of calico, obviously torn from a bedsheet.

"I've brought her something that'll surprise her—look at this!"

He unwrapped the bundle and showed a small violin of an unusual shape. Most unusual feature of all, it had only one string.

"I invented it. When you hear it you'll be surprised. It will cause a bit of a stir in London when they hear it, though I'll have to learn 'em how to play it. I've learnt some of the biggest fiddlers in England—do you know what they call me? 'The Second Paganini.' I've got playbills to prove it. 'Charles Peace, the Second Paganini.' I've had some of the highest people

in the land come up to me and say: 'Why don't you go on the stage, Mr. Peace?' I can prove that too."

"I daresay you can," interrupted the other impatiently. "But I am not interested in fiddles, nor does madame desire music. It is on another matter I wish to speak to you before you see her. She will ask you to do something in Sheffield—possibly to take somebody away. Nothing you must do without first consulting me—you understand? You must take no steps until I have gone over every detail of your plans."

Peace shifted his movable jaw restlessly, his deep-set eyes on the Russian.

"Is she here?" he asked suddenly.

"Madame—oh, no, you mean the Nurse Garden?"

The little man nodded.

"No, she has gone—the Sergeant Eltham came yesterday and drove her into Sheffield to see the doctor."

"Sergeant Eltham . . . a bald man with whiskers?" Peace scratched his chin uneasily.

"Do you know him?"

A moment's hesitation.

"Yes, I know the old hound! He swore my life away—stood up in the witness box and perjured himself so that I wonder the roof didn't fall in. They say these London detectives are liars, but this man could teach 'em something! Ain't she coming back, the nurse?"

"She is staying with Dr. Mainford."

The jaw of the little man thrust out.

"That puppy! Said he'd throw me out of the trap, and I could have put him across my knee and broken his back! Nobody knows how strong I am. I once took a six-foot navvy and threw him over a hedge, and I've

got people to prove it. There was a lord who bet I couldn't carry a twenty-score pig for half a mile, and I done it for a mile, and nobody would have thought, to look at me, that I'd——"

"Yes, yes—you are wonderful, but that is not the point. This young woman must not be hurted—hurt—you understand? Whatever madame says."

Peace looked at him cunningly through half-closed eyes.

"You tell me what I got to do and what I ain't got to do? Suppose I tell her ladyship what you're telling me, you'd get into a bit of a row, wouldn't you?"

If Baumgarten had followed his natural inclination he would have taken the long-barrelled pistol that he could see in the drawer of his desk and wiped out of existence the man who was an offence to him.

"You may tell madame if you wish. She already knows my views. Now you may see her. You need not bring your fiddle, for she does not require music."

He led the way up the stairs, Peace following, carrying, in spite of his instructions, the one-string fiddle and its bow.

It was into a smaller room, which he had never seen before, that he was ushered. Madame sat at her secretaire, wearing a padded gown. She was smoking a brown cigarette, a remarkable spectacle. Peace had never seen a woman smoking before, though he had seen men indulging in the offensive practice of cigarette smoking.

"Sit down, nice man," she said. "Give him the stool, Peter. He will look so odd! What have you there?"

Peace handed the fiddle to her with a smirk.

"He said you wouldn't want to see it."

She examined the home-made instrument curiously.

"I have seen such things in Russia," she said, as she handed it back, and the little man's face fell.

"I invented that out of me head——" he began.

"I have seen it in Russia, my man. It is very interesting and some day you shall play it for me."

She swept the secretaire clear of papers and rested her elbows upon it, staring at her visitor thoughtfully.

"Sergeant Elt'am—do you know him? Is he important?"

"He is a liar," said Peace promptly.

"All policemen are liars," said madame. "I am not interested in their moral characters. But is he of great importance?"

"He is nobody," said Peace. "He's only a copper, a sergeant. Would he be only a sergeant if he was clever? Suppose he had my brains, where would he be? Chief Constable of England—that's where he'd be, sitting in a grand office in Parliament, ordering people about."

"Nobody has your brains, little man," she cooed.

"Nor his modesty," muttered Baumgarten, and Peace shot him a baleful glare in his direction.

"And Dr. Mainford—what of him? Is he clever?"

"A whippersnapper," said Peace. "I could break him in two across my knee. I've got the strength of ten men."

"Is he well known?" she persisted patiently. "Suppose he went away, said nothing to anybody, would he be missed very much?"

"There's hundreds of doctors in Sheffield," said Peace. "They'd go to somebody else."

"That is not what I want to know." She drummed her fingers irritably upon the mahogany writing desk.

"Is his—what do you call it?—practice very large?"

Here Mr. Peace was at sea. He knew nothing of practices, had only the vaguest idea of the system under which doctors work.

"I told you it was useless to ask him this," interrupted Baumgarten, a touch of asperity in his tone. "The man can only tell you what he knows, and he knows nothing."

The face of the little man went livid. Baumgarten had touched him on the raw. His colossal vanity was hurt. To question his omniscience was to commit a deadly offence.

"Know nothing, don't I?" he spluttered, but she calmed him again.

"I see that you have not studied the doctor, and why should you? Now, my friend, listen."

From a pigeon-hole she took a slip of paper.

"You can read, of course?"

"I went to the best school in England——" began Peace.

"Here are some names and some addresses. They are friends of the man Wertheimer. The first one is the young woman to whom he has paid his addresses."

"Courting her?"

She nodded.

"They are engaged perhaps—I am not sure. He writes to her regularly. Do you know Manchester?"

Peace leered at her.

"Do I know me own right hand?" he asked.

"I see you do," she went on. "She lives there. She is young and romantic. Possibly she keeps all his letters—where I do not know. The bureau, under her pillow, near to her heart—God knows! You are a

clever little man; I have always said so. You are adorable. I am your friend and your disciple, isn't it—is that not so? You will make inquiries in your own way. You are too clever to be told. Possibly a servant will tell you where the young lady keeps her letters. I would like those."

He eyed her suspiciously, a little resentfully. Nobody must think ill of him or regard him disparagingly.

"Any one would think I was a burglar, the way you're talking!" he complained, and she smiled at him.

"How absurd! Of course you are not a burglar; you are a very clever man, and you are a wonderful spy. In Russia you would be a great man, earning thousands of roubles."

Peace considered the matter. He was a little ruffled. The polite fiction of his integrity had to be maintained. Burglary was vulgar and low, but spying——

He could dramatise himself into any rôle. Already he was slinking through the snowy streets of St. Petersburg in pursuit of Nihilists.

"Can you do this for me, my dear friend?"

He hesitated.

"I know a man," he said slowly, "a common man who does a bit of burglaring. I ain't seen him for years, but he'd do anything to oblige me. I saved his life—jumped into the river when he'd gone down for the third time and brought him out. They wanted to give me a medal, but I got away—never even so much as left me name."

"Modesty again," murmured the irrepressible Baumgarten.

"There is another thing I want to speak to you about," madame went on quickly, to check the little man's snarling retort. "You remember the girl—the

nurse? You wanted to take her for a walk. You remember you asked me?"

"I'd have treated her like a lady," said Peace vehemently. "I always treat ladies as such. I'd have took her into the best public-house and given her nothing but wine. Nobody's ever said I wasn't a gentleman——"

"Yes, yes, yes, that I know. But she has run away from me, to the doctor. I think he is her lover."

The man's face became distorted with rage.

"If he does any harm to that young girl I'll smash his head in!" he growled. "I can't abear seeing women treated cruel."

She was secretly amused, but did not show it. She knew something of Mr. Peace and his private reputation; knew, though he was not aware of this, that he had so beaten his wife that her face was permanently disfigured; knew other unwholesome facts which did not accord with this profession of chivalry.

"You are quite right," she said. "It is admirable of you! You have the heart of a chevalier, my little man. She is in bad hands. I would like to bring her back to me. She may tell stories about us—about you, for example. This doctor is a busybody, very arrogant and unscrupulous. Also he is a friend of your Sergeant Elt'am. That is very bad for us all."

"I'll get her back," interjected Peace excitedly. "It's just come to me how I can do it! That's how my mind works, my ladyship. Other people think hours and days and months—it comes to me of a sudden! I'll follow her round when she goes out for a walk; I'll talk to her. She can't shake me off. Then I'll have a handsome pony chaise and ask her to go for a ride and bring her here."

"Very clever," said Baumgarten. "And suppose the doctor is out walking with her?"

"I'll settle him," said Peace with an ugly grin. "You mark my words, mister."

Baumgarten and the woman exchanged a glance. He shook his head slightly, and he saw agreement in her eyes.

"That will not be good, I think. We must try some other plan. But in the meantime these letters—I must have them. There is twenty pounds for you—ten pounds to-day and ten pounds when the letters come. The girl in Manchester, I mean. Afterwards you must try this man." She pointed to the second name on the list. "He is a friend also of Wertheimer. Do you know Mr. Dyson?"

"I know everybody in Sheffield," said Peace, and ignored the sarcastic click of Mr. Baumgarten's lips. "Dyson? He's got a greengrocer's shop in——"

"He is an engineer on the railway," said madame. "He has a very attractive wife."

"Leave it to me," said the little man.

That satyr smile of his sickened Baumgarten, and he was a man with a strong stomach.

"I will tell you about him later," said madame. "First"—her finger went to the top of the list—"this girl. Here is the address. I do not know what kind of house it is, but that you will find out. If anything happens you will not, of course, speak of me."

"Don't worry."

Peace would have taken the slip of paper, but she held it under her hand.

"Have you a book? I will write it for you."

"I can write," he said gruffly.

He was very touchy on the point of his education.

She watched him whilst laboriously he copied the name and address in a little notebook with a stub of pencil. He wrote as a child writes, letter by letter, muttering each as he set it down.

" That's good writing." He showed her the illiterate scrawl triumphantly. " There's people been to Oxford and Cambridge that couldn't write better than that."

CHAPTER IX

HALF an hour later Peace left the house, driving back through the silent country lanes and the deserted streets of Sheffield with a sense of importance that he had never experienced before. He was going to prove himself an expert craftsman.

He was in bed by four o'clock, up again at eight in his dingy little workroom, littered with gluepots and frame mouldings. He selected his tools with the greatest care, and left by the last train that night for Manchester with a pleasing sense of his own exalted value.

Nor had the day been spent idly. Dyson he located and observed : a tall, thin, querulous man, who spoke occasionally with an American accent, in the manner of Englishmen who have lived in the United States. Peace wondered what the wife was like, and hoped that she was a lady. He had a weakness for real ladies who wore rings and silk dresses and scented themselves lavishly.

He reached Manchester late at night, and was slipping through the barrier when a commanding voice hailed him.

"Hi, come here!"

He turned with a scowl, and, recognising the military-looking man in the long ulster as a member of the Manchester police force, he went towards him with an ingratiating smile.

"What are you doing here?"

"Why, inspector, who'd have thought of seeing you? This is a joyful surprise!"

"You look happy about it," said the other sarcastically. "You were in Manchester two nights ago."

Peace shook his head.

"No, sir, I was here last week; I'm doing a bit of business."

"Somebody cracked a nice little crib in Victoria Park. Was that the business?"

The eyes of the ugly little man opened, his big mouth drooped.

"Me, sir? I'm going straight now! No more of the narrow path that leadeth to destruction, as the Good Book says. No, sir, I've got a trade of my own—I'm picture-framing, making a living. What I say is, thank Gawd I've got a trade in my hands! People come to me and say: 'Charlie, come and help crack a crib,' but I'll have nowt of it. I've seen prison for the last time, inspector. It's a mug's game."

"How long are you going to be in Manchester?" interrupted the sceptical police officer.

Peace hesitated.

"A couple of days. I'm trying to get a contract from one of the big firms."

"Where will you be staying?"

This time without hesitation Peace gave an address: one of the three lodgings he used, but not that at which he had stayed on his previous visit.

"Come into the station inspector's office," said the police officer abruptly.

He pushed the man ahead of him until they came to a tiny, ill-lit room with a desk and a couple of chairs.

"Now let's have a look inside that bag of yours," he suggested.

Meekly the little man opened the big carpet-bag he carried, and the inspector pulled out a few articles of clothing. Beneath these was an assortment of picture-frame mouldings and such tools as were proper to the craft Peace was following.

"That's a nice, handy-looking chisel. And what do you want a centre bit for?"

"I'm a joiner," said Peace. "There's a gimlet there, too."

The inspector looked at the chisel; it was broad, sharp, an instrument of tempered steel that could be used for the carving of wood, but would also make an effective jemmy to force a window. But there, also, were the samples of mouldings. Peace never travelled without them. They were the articles which cancelled out the instruments of his trade, his sure defence in case of arrest on suspicion.

The inspector threw the tools back into the bag and did not attempt to disguise his disappointment.

"Have you got a shooter?" he asked.

"A what, sir?" Peace was amazed and hurt. "You don't mean firearms, do you, sir? Good Gawd, I've never heard of such things! I wouldn't dare carry one, I'd be afraid of it going off"

The tall inspector in the ulster looked at him straightly.

"If anything's cracked while you're here, Peace,

we shall pull you in. By the way, what are you calling yourself now, Ward or Peace ?"

"By my own name, sir—Charles Peace, the same as I was christened by according to law and the Gospel."

He hurried with his bag from the station, got on to a 'bus and was driven two miles. He lodged in a dingy little house in a street remarkable for its griminess. Not until he was in the privacy of his own room, with the blinds drawn down, did he take off his hard felt hat and remove from the webbing that held it the snub-nosed little revolver with the leather wrist-band. He broke the pistol, carefully examined the old-fashioned pinfire cartridges, and put the revolver under his pillow.

He did not go out that night, but spent the evening carving the head of a cherub ; he had begun the work in Sheffield and designed it as a present for the lady of Brinley Hall, or, alternatively, for the pretty nurse. He was an opportunist, though he had never heard the word.

CHAPTER X

LONG after he had left, Madame Stahm sat at her writing desk, chin in hand, discussing certain urgent matters with her secretary. She seemed to be impervious to fatigue, and Baumgarten, who was cast in more normal mould, had learned to snatch what sleep he could in the middle of the day, in preparation for these midnight and early morning conferences.

" We are so near to everything, it is madness," he said, for the fourth time.

" Inspiration will come," said the other.

And then :

" This doctor—what will you do with him ? "

" Dr. Mainford ? " She shrugged her lean shoulders. " I don't know. If he is troublesome——"

She did not complete the sentence.

" You must find another method." Baumgarten was firm on this. " This doctor is not like the others. He has friends ; he knows the police station, who will miss him. He is well born, too. It is not easy, Clarice. Do you think you are wise in trusting this little devil of yours ? "

He stopped suddenly. Madame had raised her finger to enjoin silence. He, too, had heard the sound, a curious swish as if somebody had brushed against the wooden panels which lined the room.

" What was that ? " she asked in a low voice.

" Rats, I think. The house is full of them," said Baumgarten.

He looked uneasily towards one ancient, panelled wall.

"It came from there, didn't it?"

Again she put her finger to her lips, and they were quiet for a few minutes. The sound was not repeated.

"Did you not say there was a passage behind that panel?"

"There is a passage behind most of the panels," said Baumgarten sourly. "The place is honeycombed with them! It is a very old house—one of the men found a tunnel in the garden; it leads heaven knows where. I will have it blocked up one day."

They listened again, but there was no sound.

Suddenly a thought occurred to Baumgarten. He hurried from the room, ran down the stairs, through the kitchen, unlocked the door of the cellar and passed through the door of the cell. That, too, was locked, and almost he turned back, reassured. Then a thought struck him, and he went into the cell.

A light was burning, though he distinctly remembered turning it out when he had gone down to give the prisoner his evening meal. The bed was humped up. At first sight it seemed as if somebody was in it, but a closer glance showed that there was nothing more substantial than the bolster and the bed—the prisoner was gone!

But where? He looked round. There was no place he could possibly be hiding; the walls were of solid stone. He looked under the bed. There was nobody there——

Then he saw in a corner of the floor a square aperture. A grey flagstone had evidently been lifted. He pulled aside the bed, struck a match and looked down. Six feet below he saw the floor of a small passage. He had no light, and less inclination to

explore. He did not doubt that the sound he had heard was the man threading his way between the panelling and Madame Stahm's bedroom.

A new surprise awaited him when he reached the hall. The door was wide open. Somebody had gone out in the brief space of time it had taken for him to reach the cellar and return; somebody who had probably been watching him. A panel swung idly on the wall where it had appeared solid. One of the worm-eaten panels was a secret door.

Flying up the stairs two at a time, he burst into Madame Stahm's presence.

"He's gone!" he said. His voice was unsteady, his hands shaking. "Now, madame, I think we must decide—prison or the Continent."

She did not answer. Her dark eyes were fixed on his.

"We will go to neither place," she said.

She shivered, brushed her correspondence towards the pigeon-holes and closed the flap of her desk, locking it with two keys.

"Send somebody to remove the bed and the chain—and let Weiss and Bermans go out in search of him—they must take riding horses."

"But suppose Lamonte——" he began.

"He will go straight to Wertheimer—and Wertheimer will do nothing. He would not dare. He would do no more than use his information to buy reconciliation with me. Now, go and do as I say!"

He hurried to convey her orders. When he came back she was staring gloomily into the little fire that burnt on the hearth. She looked round with a start as he came in.

"Yes? You have done this? Good! Now listen. I am worried about the girl Garden. Could you not

see her, Peter? You have finesse, you could tell her I am ill—dying, if you like."

He made a grimace at this.

"The doctor would come with her. How would you explain if I said I did not want the doctor? Besides, he has written, saying that she is not in a fit state to work. I'll see her if you wish. What is Mainford's address?"

She had to unlock her bureau to find her book and read it to him. He repeated, writing it down on his white shirt cuff.

"That man is our worst enemy," were her parting words.

Baumgarten could have laughed. He had met so many worst enemies that one more or less did not seem worth while bothering about. Worst enemy of all might be Lamonte . . .

. . . . . .

All that day Alan Mainford had turned over and over in his mind the superlatively important question of Jane Garden's future. He had made several calls at nursing institutions and the local hospitals, without finding the employment which he felt her abilities deserved. He had been surprised to discover the importance of her qualifications. If his practice were larger . . .

He coquetted with this idea, trying to convince himself that he was justified in the extravagance of employing a private nurse on the off-chance of his own patients requiring her. It was not an unusual practice: he could name three doctors who maintained their own nursing staff; and he became enthusiastic as he reconciled himself to the extravagance.

He put his suggestion to her at dinner that night,

and she took the view that he had expected of her.

"Will there be enough work for me to do?"

"Frankly, I don't know," he said. "Of course, I shall have to find some lodgings for you."

She nodded.

"I've been thinking about that. Would you let me the coachman's flat over your second stable?"

He stared at her.

"Why, that's a hovel!"

She laughed.

"No, it isn't; there are three nice rooms there—there's even a bathroom. Dixon was telling me that the old doctor—of whom, by the way, he never speaks except with awe—kept four horses and two grooms. It's the second groom's rooms I want. I'll have my own front door; I needn't bother to come near the house, and I know I shall be awfully comfortable. Some girls at St. Mary's had a room over some stables in Devonshire Mews, and they made a very charming home of it."

Here was a way out of one difficulty, though he was dubious as to its possibilities. To tell the truth, he had never explored the rooms of the second groom. The old doctor, whose practice he had bought, was something of an aristocrat, and from what he knew of the conveniences of his own house, Alan was certain that the rooms would be at least habitable. He said he would see them in the morning, and gave a tentative agreement, haggled for an hour over the rent she would pay—a delightful hour—and altogether had a pleasant evening.

He could get her to say very little about the life at Brinley Hall. She came here against a sense of

loyalty to her late employer. She was very vague about Baumgarten and about his employer. Apparently she knew nothing about the business side of Madame Stahm's life, except that she went three or four times a week to Sheffield, where, at the works of Dibden and Payne, two small outbuildings had been equipped and set apart for her experiments. Dibden and Payne had a lien upon the patent—if it ever materialised.

At a quarter past ten the maternity case which Alan had been expecting for three days arrived urgently, in the shape of an agitated, perspiring young father, who almost dragged Alan into the street. He had not far to go, and, as he was to discover, arrived some two or three hours before his presence was necessary.

In one respect his coming was providential. The slatternly nurse, who was not a nurse at all but a woman who engaged herself in these delicate functions, was slightly the worse for drink, and her uselessness became more apparent as the night progressed. He scribbled a note and sent it round to Jane Garden, and in half an hour she appeared, cool, immensely capable, able to deal not only with the case but with the inebriated lady she was replacing, and who eventually had to be thrown into the street and handed to the paternal care of the police. At two o'clock a howling morsel of humanity qualified for the English census. He left Jane to look after the woman and walked home.

Very capable, very sweet, very wonderful. He mused upon the phenomenon as he walked slowly homewards. She had dropped beautifully into her appointed place. It was true that the people he was attending could not afford the services of a highly trained nurse, but this was in the nature of an experiment, and from his point of view the experiment had already succeeded.

He was not a bit tired when he unlocked the door and went into his house. He took his casebook from the shelf, entered up and amplified the particulars of one or two interesting cases he had visited that day, and had just finished when he heard a knock at the door. Whoever it was did not ring, but hammered with a fist on the panel. Somebody in a hurry, for he or she knocked again, frantically.

He jumped to his feet. Something must have gone wrong with the woman he had just left. He strode into the passage and pulled open the door. A man fell forward into his arms. The weight of him and the force of the fall almost threw Alan off his feet. Recovering, he caught him round the armpits, dragged him into the surgery where he received his patients, and laid him on the floor before he struck a match and lit the gas.

The man was grimy, unwashed. Despite the coldness of the night, he wore only shirt and trousers. It was raining outside, but there was no sign of moisture on his shoulders, and this was accounted for later when outside the house was discovered the big, brown blanket that had covered him, and which had dropped off as he fell forward. His unshaven face was drawn and blue. On one side of his head were the marks of an old wound that had not properly healed, and across his bony face were three red weals.

Alan looked at the grimy, emaciated hands and felt the pulse. It was so faint as to be almost imperceptible. His feet were bare, blue with cold and streaked with blood.

Going into his little dispensary, he filled a hypodermic syringe and shot its contents into the man's forearm. He made no sign, lying apparently lifeless.

The doctor was puzzled. Who was this stranger? Whence had he come? Leaving the man on the floor, he ran through the kitchen into the stable yard and called Dixon. When he returned the man had recovered consciousness. He was staring up at the ceiling from wide-open eyes.

"Are you feeling better?"

Slowly the wreck turned his eyes on him and muttered something in a cracked voice which Alan could not distinguish. He bent down and listened. Again the man spoke, in French.

"This cannot go on. I cannot endure . . ."

Alan heard a heavy footstep in the hall. At first he thought it was Dixon, but when over his shoulder he saw the burly figure of Sergeant Eltham:

"You're the very man I could have prayed for."

"What's this?" Eltham had over his arm a big blanket. "I saw your door was open and found this outside. I wondered if Mr. Peace had been doing a little burglary. Hullo! Has he been run over?"

Briefly Alan told him what had happened and how the man had come. The wreck on the floor had subsided into unconsciousness.

"Do you know him?"

Baldy shook his head.

"No, he's a stranger to me."

He threw the rug over the man's feet.

"We ought to get him to hospital. What's the matter with him?"

"Exhaustion, and he's got a scorching temperature."

Baldy lifted the thin hand and examined the wrist curiously.

"He's had the darbies on. Look!"

Round the wrist was a raw, red mark. They found its fellow on the other wrist.

"That's funny."

He pulled up the trouser's leg, and here the marking was unmistakable. The flesh had been rubbed raw round the bone of the ankle.

The two men looked at one another.

"What do you make of it?"

For a little while the sergeant did not speak; then, with a cry, he thrust his hand into his inside pocket, and, taking out a photograph, examined it intently, looking from the man's face to the picture in his hand.

"By God, it's him!" he gasped.

"Who?" asked Alan.

"The man who disappeared from the Silver Steel works a couple of weeks ago!"

CHAPTER XI

"It's him all right," said the agitated sergeant, bending down and scrutinising the wasted face. "Look, doctor."

He handed the photograph to Alan, who identified the original the more readily because he had seen him when his eyes were open.

"I don't know his name——" began the sergeant.

Alan looked at the back of the photograph, where some particulars had been scribbled.

"Lamonte, isn't it?"

"That's right, Lamonte. Now, where did he come from?"

Baldy examined the wounded feet of the man.

"A long way, a devil of a long way. Look at his trousers—the mud's still wet. He must have had this blanket over him. I'll go out and find a policeman, and we'll get a stretcher and take him to the hospital."

He blundered out of the house, and came back in five minutes to find Alan forcing brandy down the throat of the unconscious man.

"He's pretty bad, isn't he?"

"Very bad," said Alan gravely. I don't think there's a possible hope for him. He has acute pneumonia, amongst other things, and his heart's just about finished."

At that moment Lamonte opened his eyes and stared about him wildly.

I have told you everything—everything there is to be told." he said shrilly. I can tell you no more—I know no more—I am a workman; I do not know the technique . . ."

"What is he saying?" asked Baldy urgently.

Alan was scribbling down the words, and roughly translated them.

"Listen to everything he says," urged Baldy. "Don't make any mistake, doctor. This may mean hanging dues for somebody."

The man did not speak again. He lay very quietly, scarcely breathing. Once he murmured something indistinguishable. Then, there was a little grimace of pain and he lay quiet, and it seemed to Sergeant Eltham, as he watched the poor, stricken thing, that all the anguish that was in the thin face suddenly smoothed itself out into a marvellous serenity.

The ambulance came; two policemen clumped into the passage and stood, watching, at the door.

"Ought we to move him?" asked the sergeant anxiously.

Alan nodded.

"He's dead," he said.

Henri Lamonte, sometime technical engineer in the employ of the Silver Steel Company, had gone, carrying his great and painful secret with him.

* * * * * * *

Jane Garden came into breakfast the next morning, looking as fresh as though she had risen from a perfect night of rest. There was little or nothing for her to report. The baby's grandmother had arrived and had taken charge.

"A very normal case," she said.

Alan speared a piece of bacon from the dish.

"I had a case that was not quite so normal," he said grimly, and told her of the coming and passing of Lamonte. "In fact, I've had a hectic night and feel like a wet rag trying to walk a tight-rope," he said. "I suppose you've never seen this fellow?"

Baldy had inadvertently left behind the photograph of the man, and Alan had propped it on the mantelpiece so that the sergeant could not miss it when he called again. She rose and took it down, looked at it for a long time, then shook her head.

"No, I've never seen him—I have never met him in madame's house. Didn't you sleep at all?"

He had gone to bed at four, and had been awakened by Dixon at eight.

"You must tell me how you manage to look as you do without sleep," he bantered her.

She explained that she had slept all the previous afternoon. Apparently at Brinley Hall madame was never active until nearly midnight, unless she were

going to the city. The affairs and routine of the household had been adjusted to meet Madame Stahm's activities, and the afternoon sleep was part of the general routine.

"I promised I would go back to-night. There is a little trouble in that household. They're terribly poor, aren't they?"

Alan nodded.

"That kind of trouble is fairly general in Sheffield," he said, "though, as a town, we're progressing at such a tremendous rate that we shall be a city before we know where we are!"

She sipped her tea, looking at him.

"It isn't the poverty. Apparently the wife is a little flighty—do you mind the scandals of the poor? When he had recovered from his hysteria, the father wasn't as happy about the child as you might have expected, remembering it is their first baby. She has a friend to whom he very much objects to and is very much afraid of—guess who it is?"

He looked up, startled.

"Not Peace?" he said in amazement.

She nodded.

"Charles Peace." Then, with a twinkle in her eye, she added: "Squire of dames!"

After breakfast came Baldy, acting for the moment as coroner's officer. He served a notice upon the doctor.

"We've fixed the inquest for three o'clock to-morrow, doctor. The old boy wanted to have it in the morning, but I knew you'd be busy."

"Have you found out anything about Lamonte?"

"A lot of things," said the sergeant. "I had Mr. What's-his-name of the Silver Steel Company over——"

" It's a wonder to me that you can remember Silver Steel. You mean Wertheimer, of course ? "

" That's the fellow. He knew him at once. Terribly upset he was. He's wondering what happened to that other fellow of his who disappeared."

" Does this upset your theory that Lamonte ran away with a girl ? You remember that there was a girl missing ? "

" A mistake on my part," said Baldy, unabashed. " She's gone away to see some friends in the country. I knew that, but I didn't tell anybody. This fellow from the Silver Steel cried—actually cried, doctor. Broke down when he saw this fellow. Foreigners often cry ; they kiss one another too—men ! I've seen it done at Victoria Station in London. It oughtn't to be allowed."

" What else did you learn ? "

" He'd come a very long way. One of our mounted men saw him trudging through the snow—thought it was a woman with a shawl round her. That was just outside the town. The mounted man was at a cross-roads and wasn't sure which way he had come, and didn't trouble to inquire. That's mounted men all over ! The moment you put a policeman on horseback he seems to lose his intelligence. I've said it before, and I'll say it again."

" What else did you discover ? "

The sergeant consulted his notebook.

" He'd been thrashed. There were marks on his body. There were marks also on his face. The police surgeon says they're whip marks, too. The thing's a mystery to me."

Alan thought for a long time, then he asked slowly :

"Do you connect Madame Stahm with this man's death?"

Sergeant Eltham opened his mouth and eyes.

"Good heavens, no!"

"I'll tell you something," said Alan, and related in greater detail the story of his visit to Brinley Hall and the scream he had heard.

Baldy tugged at his beard.

"It might have been a railway whistle——" he began.

"That was the half-witted explanation offered to me by one who knew better," said Alan acidly. "No, if I were you I'd make inquiries. See Madame Stahm and Baumgarten—you'd better write those names down: you'll never remember them—and if you can find any excuse, search the house."

Baldy demurred at this. It was a high matter, to be undertaken only by his superiors. For his own part he would not like to interfere or even to suggest such a thing. It was a terrible thing to accuse a woman, even if she was a foreigner, and the police just then were not popular. All these views he offered.

"The police never are popular—don't be silly," said Alan tersely. "If you're clever, you might even associate your friend Charles Peace with the death. Do you remember, you told me a small man was one of the two people who were seen attacking Lamonte?"

"It was not Peace," said the other. "He wasn't in town. He went to Manchester the night before last. Why they don't pinch him the minute he arrives at the station I can't find out. I've got a friend of mine—an inspector—and I always notify him when Peace goes to Manchester, but nothing ever happens. And while he's there there's generally a burglary or two."

"There's probably a few when he's not there," smiled Alan. And then, more seriously: "What does the police surgeon think about Lamonte?"

"Starvation, exhaustion, ill-treatment," said Baldy. "It's murder within the meaning of the Act. If we caught the fellow that did it he'd be meeting Mr. Marwood—nice fellow, Marwood: you'd never think he was a hangman, to talk to him. He's a true blue Tory, and what he says about Mr. Gladstone would make your hair curl."

The politics of hangmen did not interest Alan, and he said as much.

He spent the brief time between the departure of Eltham and the beginning of his "round" in drafting a rough report for the coroner. Baldy had promised to convey Alan's suspicions of Madame Stahm and her household to his superior officer. Whether he did so or not, no steps were taken to explore that avenue.

In all probability Sergeant Eltham had not pressed the point with his chief, for he made no secret of the fact that he regarded the suggestion as fantastical.

Throughout his rounds that morning Alan was considering the possibility of pursuing an independent line of investigation, and had half made up his mind to call on Madame Stahm, when he returned to the house for lunch. His housekeeper opened the door to him.

"There is a lady to see you. She is in the waiting-room—Madame Stahm."

"Indeed and indeed!" said Alan, a little staggered. "The mountain has come to the prophet, eh?" And then, in a low voice: "If Miss Garden wakes up, do not let her come down until Madame Stahm has gone."

Madame Stahm had a trick of enthroning herself in the most prosaic surroundings. She sat on a high chair that was in the very centre of the room, her magenta silk frock outspread, her hands primly folded in her lap. She carried with her the atmosphere of a court and greeted Alan with a quizzical smile, which was not without its queenly consideration.

"The invalid has come to you," she said gaily. "The lady with a bad heart, eh? But I have a good heart for you, doctor. My poor Jane, is she better?"

There was a hint of sarcasm in this which was not overlooked by Alan.

"Much better," he said. "So much better that she is in bed!"

Madame Stahm smiled.

"Young ladies who are out all night, attending maternity cases, must sleep sometimes. Her blood was too bad to look after me, but not too bad to look after the mother of little brats—it is too unkind of you, doctor."

He returned no answer to this. Evidently she had made a very judicious use of the time she had been waiting; also his housekeeper was a little loquacious.

"You have had a terrible case here, I am told, last night, eh? How trying to be a doctor!"

"A man who died in this room," said Alan untruthfully.

But, if he had hoped to impress Madame Stahm with a sense of tragedy, he was disappointed.

"It is a very nice room to die in," she said.

"Did you know Lamonte?"

She frowned at this.

"Lamonte? The name is familiar. My husband had a workman named Lamonte. It is very common

in Vaud. All names there are French. They become German when you cross the mountains into the Oberland, and Italian in the Trentino. In Basel they are German."

"Madame Stahm," Alan was smiling, "you haven't come here to discuss the ethnological divisions of Switzerland, have you? Do you know anything about the death of Lamonte?"

She lifted her shoulder.

"I? How absurd! Why should I know? The poor man was killed by an accident, I understand. I knew nothing about him till your housekeeper spoke to me. You do not like me, Herr Doctor? You think I am a bad woman, eh? You think I killed Lamonte—cut his t'roat or something? Absurd! Presently you will say that I am in love with Peace, that ugly little man. You are unreasonable, my dear frien', because you are prejudiced. You are like that funny policeman who does not remember names. You think I am bad because I am foreign!"

She had a very musical laugh when she was amused, and she seemed amused now.

"I came here, first"—she ticked off the items delicately on her fingers—"first, to ask after my dear Jane. Naturally, I am attached to the girl, and I have her good name to think of. You are a doctor, a man of the world; is it good that a young woman should live in your house, where you have no mother, no sister, aunt, Gott knows what, to look after her? Two, I came because I owe you an apology. I was very, very rude to you. I was angry with you. Peter Baumgarten told me I should be ashamed, so I came to apologise and ask you please to continue seeing me."

Alan shook his head.

"That is not why you came. Lamonte was alive when he reached here; he was able to speak. You want to know what he said."

A look of blank astonishment was his answer.

"Why should I care what he said? How does it interest me, my friend, what any man in the delirium of death may say? When people are dying they are not sensible; they say wild things. Is it not true? You are a doctor and you know."

She waited a while, but Alan was silent, and she went on.

"He might have spoken about me—why should he not? If he was one of my husband's employees, it would be very likely. He might also speak about Mr. Wertheimer, for whom he worked, or Mr. Eckhardt, whom he joined in America, or about you, doctor—what would it matter? Nothing. If he said anything——"

She paused expectantly.

"What he said you will read in the account of the inquest which will be published in the *Sheffield Telegraph*."

"Why not at the court?" she asked.

"Will you attend?" he asked, and instantly realised the mistake he had made.

There was triumph in her smile.

"Then I am not to be called as a witness? And he said nothing about me at all! Not even in his dying delirium. My dear doctor, you are almost simple. I shall never dare trust your advice again!"

She had learned all she wanted to know. As she rose, pulling on her gloves and adjusting her bonnet before the square of looking-glass, she was still smiling.

"You must not think I am a wicked woman, or

blame me for everything. If I had lived here in those days you would have said: 'This woman made the Bradfield flood'—and that wouldn't be true! No, no, there are quite a number of my acts which are innocent."

When he took her to the door, her victoria was there, with its footman standing, rug on arm, to assist her into the carriage.

"You will come and see me, doctor, and bring me all the news, eh? My friend Baumgarten likes you—and bring my little nurse. We are lonely without her. But she must come back without scandal to her name, you understand?"

There was a malicious little smile on her lips as she drove off. Alan went into the house and had a lot to think about during his frugal lunch.

He did not see the mother and the child until late in the evening, and then found another patient. The husband of the woman sat in the tiny, stone-flagged kitchen, nursing a bruised face. It was the anxious wife who asked Alan to see him, for she feared some permanent injury to an eye. The eyesight was unaffected, however, though the flesh surrounding the priceless organ was blue and purple.

"Had a fight," mumbled the man. "He hit me when I wasn't looking . . . up at the railway station. I waited all day for him to come back."

"Who is 'him'?" asked Alan. "Peace?"

The man looked up with a scowl.

"You heard about it, too, did you. I won't have him near my house."

"You're a fool—leave him alone," said Alan, "especially while your wife is ill. If she runs a temperature I'll have her taken to the infirmary."

The man winced at this. Like all his class, the very proximity of the workhouse was in itself a disgrace.

The woman's mother had arrived, and there was no necessity for Jane Garden to return to her nursing, he decided. He arrived home in time to stop her going out.

They had an uninterrupted evening, when he taught her écarté. She was an apt pupil, but the game for him had less interest than the player. He realised this night that he was desperately in love, and when, on the following day, she suggested she should go round the shops, trying to find a few simple articles of furniture, he insisted on placing at her disposal the very considerable quantity of his own household goods that was stored in the town.

CHAPTER XII

MEDICAL men loathe inquests: they are time wasters of the worst kind, and there is always the possibility that the ordeal may be interrupted by the too zealous questionings of a juryman. For it is a peculiar delusion of coroner's juries that something is being kept from them.

The inquest on Lamonte, however, was a brief affair, the verdict being an open one. There was not sufficient evidence to justify a verdict of wilful murder, and the jury, after the way of all juries, played for safety, and returned one of those curiously obscure pronouncements which mean nothing.

He did not see Charles Peace, though he had reason to know he had returned. Baldy told him that Peace

had been stopped on his departure from Manchester and his bag searched, for during his stay there had been two flagrant burglaries. In one case a house had been broken into, a desk forced and all its contents taken away. Curiously enough, although there were many valuable articles in the house and within the burglar's reach, he had taken nothing

The second burglary was a more serious affair; nearly five hundred pounds' worth of property, mainly silver, had been stolen. The search of Peace and his few belongings at the station had revealed nothing. Indubitably he had been engaged in legitimate business, for he showed orders that he had given and paid for, to a wholesale manufacturer of mouldings. No trace of the stolen property could be found.

If the police had gone to the booking clerk they would have discovered that the man had taken two tickets from Manchester to Sheffield, and that the second was for a boy who passed the barrier well ahead of Peace, carrying a heavy parcel under his arm.

"Don't you pretend you know me, boy," warned Peace. "When we get to Sheffield you just follow me home, and there's a golden sovereign for you."

In this way the stolen property passed under the nose of a strong force of police that were gathered to intercept the burglar at the station, and the three plain-clothes officers who awaited the arrival of the train at Sheffield.

Peace sat in the bosom of his family that night, tuning his fiddle and discoursing upon his favourite subject, which was Charles Peace.

"I'm too clever for 'em. If they had people like me in the police force there'd be no crime. I'd fill the prisons, but they wouldn't be prisons like they are now.

All the screws would have to treat men like men, and the prisoners would have beds to sleep on and good food to eat, and they'd be able to smoke and read the newspapers, and their families could come and stay with 'em for a few days every month."

His worn wife said nothing. She was sewing a garment by the shaded light of a paraffin lamp.

"Hear what I said?" he snarled.

"I hear you, Charles," she said meekly.

"Well, say something," he said savagely. "Don't sit there like a stuffed image! I don't know why I've come home to this place at all. I could have the best home in the land if I wanted it. All the lovely women are off their heads about me. Not ugly old devils like you, but lovely ones—put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"I'm sure, Charles," she said with a sigh.

"There's a lady bred and born out there"—he pointed vaguely—"who says I'm God. What do you think of that?"

"I think it's blasphemy," she said, and in his whimsical mood he agreed.

He had certain deep religious convictions, and though he did not believe in the hereafter, or think that he would develop such a belief, he had a keen desire to be on the safe side. He had moments of enthusiastic frenzy, when he composed hymns and prayers, and on one occasion went to the length of asking a prison chaplain to publish some examples of the latter activity, "for the good of the world."

He packed his family off to bed; he had some private work to do, he said. This was no new experience. His private work took him out late at night. Twice he had not come back for six years, and at odd

intervals there had come to them letters written on blue paper, bearing the superscription of various of Her Majesty's prisons. They usually began: "Dear Wife and Children, this comes hoping to find you quite well as it leaves me, thank God." Usually the letters were filled with pious and praiseworthy promises as to his future, and plentifully sprinkled with samples of more intensive piety, for they were written for the prison chaplain to read and for the prison governor to censor. A man who expresses penitence, gives nobody any trouble, calls warders "sir" punctiliously, and is ready and willing to pass on a little private information that he has acquired from his fellow prisoners, has a better chance of getting his ticket than one who is unregenerate.

At half-past one Peace slipped the key of his house into his pocket, fastened the revolver inside his high-crowned hat, and, pulling on a new ulster he had bought, went out to the rendezvous where Madame Stahm's victoria, drawn by two dashing bays, was waiting for him. He covered himself up well, and shrank back inside the hood, though, if he had had his wish, he would have made the journey in daylight under the admiring or astonished eyes of the multitude. Some day he would have a pair of horses, but the carriage would be a bit different. He invented a new victoria as he drove through the night, for he could not resist improving on the best. He would turn a carriage like this into a little room where he could change his clothing when the necessity arose; he would have candle lamps to read by, and indiarubber tyres—why not? If bicycles had india-rubber tyres why should carriages run on steel? He had once tried to ride a bicycle and had fallen off. It had a very high, big,

wheel and a little wheel behind it, and you wore frogged tunics and little round caps—nobody knew why. There were several in Sheffield; it was a nine days' wonder, people said, and would pass away. Peace thought it would last, that everybody would have bicycles, and was laughed at for his pains.

When he had got into the carriage he had tucked away a small packet of letters under one of the cushions. You never knew what the police were going to do. He had been searched twice that day, and maybe they were watching him when he came out of the house and were following him. He lifted the leather flap of the little window at the back of the hood, but saw no lamps in view. They weren't clever enough to follow him. That was the trouble with the police: they hadn't his intelligence.

He reached Brinley Hall behind the sweating horses in an incredibly short space of time, retrieved his letters and went importantly into Madame Stahm's bureau. The first question she asked him was if he had been followed.

"They'd have to come fast to follow me, my lady, behind them horses of yours."

"Did you get what I sent you for?"

He took out the letters and laid them down.

"All the rest was bills," he said.

He had also found six five-pound notes, but he did not mention these. He would sell them on the morrow for two pounds apiece to a fence who would send them to the Continent.

"Give me the letters."

She was impatient and almost snatched them from his hand.

Turning them over, she scanned them one by one, her brow furrowed.

"These are not what I want," she said. "The girl's name isn't Emily."

The man's face fell.

"I did what you told me to do. You gave me the address—I got it here."

He fumbled in his pocket for his book, and she gave it one glance.

"Thirty-nine, you fool. You've written 'fifty-nine.' You went to the wrong house."

"My friend must have made a mistake——" began Peace.

"Don't exasperate me, little man. Your friend! Why should you be afraid of my knowing? Of course it was you!"

The crestfallen man was staring at the notebook. There were almost tears in his eyes.

"It was a hard crib, too," he whined. "Took me all day to find the servant girl, and the best part of a night to do the place. I thought it was funny. There was nothing in the letters about love—I read 'em careful, too!"

She mastered her fury with an effort.

"It is lamentable, but you must try again. These letters have no value whatever. They are stupid letters from a woman to another woman."

"There was no young lady stayin' in the place," began Peace.

"Then why did you go there?" she snapped. "I told you there was a young lady living in the house."

The man bridled. He had been called a fool, touched in his tenderest place, that sensitive vanity of his.

"All I can say is, missus, you'd better do the job yourself," he growled. "I'm not used to havin' females call me names."

Baumgarten, who, as a rule, took no attitude sympathetic with Peace, tried to pour oil on troubled waters.

"It was an error anybody could make, Clarice," he said suavely. "Our friend here made a pardonable mistake. I might have done the same, so might you."

Madame recovered an appearance of calm. She caught and heeded the warning in her "secretary's" tone.

"Yes, yes, it is stupid of me, but my heart was set on this thing. I am sorry, little man. You shall be paid just as if you had given me what I wanted."

If she had read the mind of Charles Peace she could have made no stronger appeal.

"Not me—I don't take a penny till I give you the letters. Thirty-nine, was it? I know the layout of the whole street, but I've got to get into Manchester some other way. I'll go down to London and take a train to Manchester, and get out at the station before where they examine the tickets. And I'll come back the same way. If I say I'll do a thing, I do it! That's me! It's not money that makes me—it's pride!"

She let him talk about himself for a little while and then she gave him news, and incidentally unfolded a part of her plan.

"The woman I spoke to you about, and the tall man, are moving to Darnall. There are two empty houses in a terrace there; she has taken one. Would it be a good idea if you moved into the other, supposing I paid your rent and the expenses of moving?"

The idea appealed to Peace. He was by nature a

restive soul, and had never lived long in any place. Darnall was an old haunt of his and a place of pleasant associations. Moving meant nothing more than exchanging one brick box, with all its inconveniences, for another. And there was adventure in it—human adventure, which was very pleasing to him.

He had never seen Mrs. Dyson, and could therefore create the image of her in his mind. It made the early morning journey to London pass in a very little time, and carried him into the outskirts of Manchester almost before the journey seemed begun.

There was no time to scrape acquaintance with any of the household staff of the house in Seymour Grove. He must take his chance.

He reached Whalley Range in the dusk of the evening, and reconnoitred the house. Luck was with him : he saw a light appear in one of the upper windows, and a girl of twenty-five or twenty-six pull down the blinds. By the light of the lamp her shadow was thrown against the white window blind, and he saw that she was writing. This was luck with a vengeance. Greater luck was his when, later, he saw a man call at the house. He was in there half an hour, and both came out together. Peace gathered, from what he overheard, that the man was some relation.

As they passed him where he crouched behind the bushes in the garden, he heard the girl say something in a foreign language. The man with her laughed and then she said in English,

" I don't like leaving the house empty, even for an evening. Papa will not be home till midnight."

Empty ? That meant no servants. And so it proved. The back door was easily forced. He reached the bedroom, broke the bureau and took the letters. They were

tied together with blue ribbon. Subsequently he discovered, to his disgust, that they were written in French. At least, he supposed they were French. He had looked forward to reading them : he had that kind of mentality.

Carefully buttoning them into a pocket on the inside of his coat pocket, he came out of the back door, passed up a side passage and into the front garden.

There was on that beat an officious police constable who was not particularly popular with such of the lower orders as lived in the neighbourhood. Peace, who could see in the dark, saw the uniformed man from a long distance, and crossed the road. The policeman crossed to meet him.

" Hallo ! Where are you going ? "

" Home, sir."

It was a great mistake for him to say " sir." The policeman, a shrewd man, sensed a member of the criminal classes.

" Where have you been ? "

" I have come from Manchester ; I'm going back."

" Let's have a look at you."

The constable caught him by the lapel of his coat, not too gently, and at that moment Peace struck out with all his strength, and with all the concentrated hatred he had in his heart for authority. The blow caught the policeman under the jaw, and he went down like a log.

CHAPTER XIII

In an instant Peace ran.

He turned down a side lane, clambered over a fence, crossed a field and came on to the main road. He saw a horse 'bus coming along and swung himself on to the step, clambered up the iron rungs of a perpendicular ladder on to the top.

If the policeman had recognised him, or could describe him, it might mean a stretch for him. He reached a station where he knew the trains would stop, and, learning that a fast train for Sheffield was due in a few minutes, he concealed himself on the dingy platform, got into an empty carriage and hid himself under the seat.

To take a ticket would be fatal. Booking clerks and ticket inspectors would be able to describe him, and whether he was journeying to London or Sheffield, but particularly if he was going to Sheffield.

The train was evidently an express. After a while he came out of his place of concealment and began examining the letters. Then it was he had his disappointment, for the most amorous passages were as Greek to him.

The signals were against the engine driver outside a station five miles north-west of Sheffield, and the train slowed down and stopped.

The opportunity was too good to be lost: opening the carriage door he dropped on to the permanent way, climbed down a steep embankment, and, after half an hour's tramping through snowy fields, reached a deserted highway.

It was a coincidence that the only man who saw him that night was Sergeant Eltham, and Baldy's not too friendly greeting took a load off the little man's mind.

"Didn't I see you outside the Norfolk Hall this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir," said Peace promptly.

"Why did you run away?"

Peace replied glibly. His alibi was established; and he had need of it, for Police Constable Cock had circulated a fair description of him, which did not come to Sheffield, however, until the following morning.

Peace was pulled into the station as a matter of routine. He could triumphantly produce his arch-enemy to testify that he was in Sheffield that afternoon.

"And when I come to think it over," said the disgruntled Baldy, "I'm not so sure that it was him! The little devil answered so quick that I ought to have known he was kidding me. Anyway, he didn't arrive at the railway station, and so far as I know, he didn't leave for Manchester. That Peace is as artful as a waggon load of monkeys!"

When Baldy accosted him that night, near the Town Hall, he was standing on the edge of the kerb, running his hands up and down his long trousers' pockets, listening to the musical jingle of golden coins.

"I'm not so sure I saw you outside the Norfolk Hall——" began Baldy.

"Then you should be sure," snarled the other. "You shouldn't go making statements if you ain't prepared to stick to 'em. You saw me and I saw you."

Sergeant Eltham swallowed something.

"They tell me you're moving—going over to Darnall?"

"I don't like this neighbourhood. It's low."

It had been agreed that if he succeeded in getting the letters he would send a message notifying Madame Stahm, and that Baumgarten should come over and collect them. This was not to Peace's liking. He wanted to parade his success and his efficiency before the woman who had condemned him. But her orders were imperative. There were very excellent reasons why he should keep away since the death of Lamonte.

He met Baumgarten at a little wayside inn a few miles out of Sheffield, and the packet was handed over. Baumgarten took one look at the letters and his eyes sparkled.

"Can you read it, mister?" And, when the other nodded: "Read us a bit—a courting bit!" said Peace eagerly.

"My friend"—Baumgarten tapped him on the shoulder benignly—"you require no lessons in the art of writing love letters."

The little man almost purred at the compliment.

Madame Stahm very graciously consented to receive him a week later. He had to come with three picture frames and go through the formalities of being a tradesman calling for orders, a proceeding which, for some reason or other, irked him.

He was a very vain little man. Nothing pleased him better than to be described as a gentleman; nothing drove him to such fury as a suggestion of his illiteracy. If he could play her emotions, no less could she play him.

An ingenious woman was Madame Stahm. She would sit for hours, dreaming great schemes, ingenious schemes, unbelievably clever in their intricacy. She had thought a lot about Jane Garden and the doctor,

and she had woven into her fanciful stories this crude, ugly man.

Thoroughness was her keynote. She had not been content to discover the antecedents of the girl and her history so far as the hospital could supply it ; she went farther afield, made inquiries in the little Midland village where the girl had been born. Jane's mother and father were dead. They had been an unhappy pair, and had separated a few months before Jane's birth. Mr. Garden had married beneath him, a pretty girl from a travelling circus. There was some talk of a former lover—the whole matter had to be thrashed out in the divorce court ; but the evidence was not sufficiently convincing to secure their complete separation.

The villagers talked, as villagers will continue their gossip, long after the turf had been laid upon the two people mostly concerned.

Madame was fascinated by the news she garnered and pressed her inquiries farther, and all the time that ingenious brain of hers was seeking a recipe as to how the material she had gathered could be cooked into a meal that would be most unpalatable to the man she hated without any reservations—the doctor, who had defied her, had threatened her by inference, and who guessed her ghastly secret.

Her plan took definite shape the day Peace arrived. That he should come into it at all was due to the fortuitous circumstance of his arrival. She gave him the reward she had promised him ; generously increased it ; found a malignant delight in adding to her kindness by translating one of the letters that he had stolen ; and then brought the conversation to Jane.

" I don't like stuck-up people. She's too stuck-up

for me," he said. " And she's only a bit of a girl, too. I like women of the world, and they like me. I'm not good-looking, m'lady, but I've got a way with me."

He continued in the same strain, and she did not interrupt him. When she did speak she brought the conversation back to Jane. Anyway, his idea that they should be better friends was very impossible, and for many reasons.

" Like what ? " he demanded resentfully.

She told him, and he nearly jumped out of the chair.

For two hours they sat together, talking eagerly. Baumgarten, who looked in once or twice, withdrew as quickly as he appeared, glad to escape from the atmosphere Peace brought with him.

It was past dark when the victoria carried Charles Peace back to Darnall. The carriage always dropped him in a lonely place near the village ; he hated this idea, but madame was adamant. His mind was now completely occupied. The Dysons had moved in ; he had had a first glimpse of the lady and approved of her. He found no difficulty in making the acquaintance of the woman and her acid-tongued husband.

Men were always more difficult than women, for men never trusted him, and some women trusted him too much. The acquaintance had become as much of a friendship as the lanky Dyson would permit. The American woman found him ugly but fascinating.

It was a week after his visit that Jane Garden met the little man, and it was a curious fact that she never spoke to Alan of the meeting. She would have passed on, but the man spoke to her, and out of sheer civility she stopped. He had something to say to her, something that could not be said in a public place. He was very respectful, rather sad. She found herself pitying him.

And then he mentioned a name she had not heard for years, and her marrow froze. She had an hour to spare; Alan was away and would not be back until the evening. She went with the ugly man into the new Frith Park which had just opened. And here he told her what he swore he had never told a soul, and as she listened she grew sick at heart, and once would have fainted but for a supreme effort of self-control.

At the gates of the park she left him. He wanted to see her again in a few days, but she shook her head.

"I don't want to see you. I never want to see you again," she said breathlessly. "I hate you—my God, how I hate you now!"

A cab was passing and she hailed it and drove back to Alan's house. He saw how white she was when he came in, and thought she was ill.

"I really do think you ought to have a rest. That job with Madame Stahm must have taken a lot of vitality out of you."

"I'm all right—I'm quite all right," she said.

She spent her evenings in her room, sewing the chintzes she had bought for her new home. To Alan it seemed she had suddenly become a new person, a Jane Garden he did not know, and he was puzzled to explain the change of attitude. He asked her point-blank one morning what the trouble was; she answered him a little shortly, and he decided not to interfere. She certainly had her own troubles, her own life. A little pang of jealousy grew out of this consideration. Did any man form part of her own life? he wondered. But she would have told him: he was sure of that.

Once, when he spoke of Peace, she changed the subject abruptly, almost rudely. He was talking about the woman whose child had been born and whose

husband was still nursing a grievance against her, and out of this arose the reference to Peace.

"Please don't talk about him—it is horrible," she said in a low voice, and he saw that the hands that held the needle and chintz were shaking.

He could diagnose this as nerves: it could be nothing else. Trained nurses do not take too prim a view of the ugly things of life. The mystery of her attitude was to remain unsolved for a long time and develop into a greater and more horrible mystery.

She was younger than he had thought, had begun her nursing experiences before she was sixteen.

"I had to work," she explained. "I lived with an aunt who wasn't particularly fond of me, and there were certain other complications."

What they were she did not tell him.

The death of Lamonte brought to Alan a considerable amount of correspondence, and he was glad of her assistance in such odd hours as she could give him, for her French was perfect. Lamonte had relations, who wrote either to him or to the police. For some reason or other the police decided to turn over all the correspondence to Alan as it arrived, and the thing became a little wearisome; the more so as most of the relations seemed interested in only one subject—the amount of money the dead man had left.

She made an admirable secretary; wrote in a beautiful hand. He almost regretted that he had chosen the nurse's rôle for her. Except for this strange sense of restraint, this invisible barrier which had grown between them, the time which followed was ideal, though he was very little in her society.

He could not remember the time when she had not been an essential factor in his life, someone to think

of when he woke, some sure guide to his dreams. He had a trick of paying little compliments, directly or by inference. They used to amuse her in the first days of their acquaintance, and pleased her, too. Now they seemed to worry her, and he either stopped paying them or felt self-consciously foolish when he saw their effect.

Yet she came to him with all her difficulties and by implication emphasised her dependence on him. But always there was that aloofness which distressed him, so that once he asked her bluntly about her health, and, more bluntly still, if he was boring her. Her emphatic "No" to the last question kept him happy for a week.

CHAPTER XIV

LETTERS came for her: how or when they were delivered he could not guess. They did not come by post. Once he saw a ragged little messenger leave the front door hurriedly and, entering the house, surprised her reading a note. She was standing by the window, her face in profile, her fine eyebrows bent, and he saw by the rise and fall of her bosom that something had agitated her.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

Quickly she crumpled the letter in her hand and put it behind her.

"Nothing—nothing," she said.

He could not ask her particulars about her correspondence. A reference to the letter later in the day seemed to cause her distress. She went out in the afternoon and came back looking like death.

"In the name of heaven, what's wrong with you?"

"Nothing." She was almost defiant.

Then came his astonishing discovery. He had been called to a distant case, and was driving back late one afternoon, when Dixon decided to take a short cut through a lane. the road surface of which was bad, but which undoubtedly cut off a long and tiresome angle. At one point of the lane, set back in the hedge, was a gate leading into a field. He was dimly conscious of seeing two people standing by the gate, but not until he was abreast of them did he recognise them. The woman was Jane. The little man, who was leering into her face, was Charles Peace!

His heart nearly stopped beating. For a moment he had a wild inclination to jump from the carriage and go back and demand an explanation, but he checked himself.

She came home three-quarters of an hour after he arrived, and she offered no explanation, nor did he ask for one. He was baffled, bewildered, in some degree horrified. That this girl, refined and delicate, should find in Peace an acceptable companion was unthinkable.

Patiently he waited, day after day, for Jane to take him into her confidence; but apparently she did not think it was necessary. Whether she had seen him he could not guess. She certainly gave no sign, never once by a word betraying the least uneasiness.

Peace! It was incredible. A foul little burglar, a man whose name was a byword even amongst the lower sort. . . . Was there any truth in this story of an ultra-human fascination? He rejected the idea as unbelievable.

Other people had seen them together. One of his patients called him back as he was leaving the house.

"Oh, by the way, that nurse of yours—Miss Garden . . . the girl who came here for two days . . . don't you think she ought to be told?"

"Told what?" asked Alan curtly.

"I saw her the other day in Frith Park with a most dreadful little man. I believe he is a well-known character in these parts. And Mrs. Hackitt also saw them together on another day. She ought not to do a thing like that."

"I think Nurse Garden is quite capable of looking after herself," said Alan, and offended a wealthy patient almost beyond forgiveness.

There must be a reason for it. Was it something connected with Madame Stahm and her establishment, some secret that Peace had unearthed? The more he thought, the more confused he became.

It hurt him that she did not volunteer some statement about this peculiar friendship of hers. How could she reconcile her vehement declarations that she hated him with these fugitive meetings? She never saw him except by day. Sometimes she would snatch an hour from a case she was nursing to meet him at a convenient but isolated place, and always Alan knew when these meetings had taken place. She was graver, more laconic of speech, less able to concentrate her mind.

Sometimes he thought she was labouring under great mental agony, and once he bluntly suggested that she had something on her mind and that it would be to her advantage to tell him. The suggestion was received coldly, and he realised that if their friendship was to continue he must make no further reference to this amazing acquaintance of hers.

It worried him a great deal, even though there was something impersonal in the friendship she main-

tained with the disreputable little blackguard. She was so serene, so infinitely sane, and his loyalty to her was such that the commonplace explanation did not enter into his calculations. No intelligent woman could fall under the spell of the little picture-frame maker. He could believe anything but that.

He discovered that even when she did not meet him, Peace dogged her footsteps. He was seen waiting outside houses where she was nursing, and was moved on by the police.

Baldy was puzzled, and came to Alan for an explanation.

"I run the rule over him in the street, but I couldn't find any burglar's tools in his pocket, but there's the fact: he has been watching that house for two days. I think I am entitled to pull him in."

Alan shook his head.

"I shouldn't if I were you."

Baldy looked at him oddly.

"There's no truth in that story——?" He hesitated.

"What story?" asked Alan.

"That he's hanging around—well, Miss Garden?"

Alan thought for a long time, then said: "No," but not very convincingly.

"I'll tell you what I think, Eltham," he said. "This man must know a friend of Miss Garden's, somebody she does not wish to offend. The little devil is using this as an excuse for speaking to her."

"Has he annoyed her at all?" asked Baldy quickly. "I'll put him inside if he has."

"She has not complained," replied Alan. "So far as I know, he has said nothing to offend her."

Sergeant Eltham rubbed his shining head in perplexity.

"I can't understand it—he bought her a present——"

"A what?" said Alan, startled.

"A present—a silver ring with an imitation stone. He bought it all right: one of our plain-clothes men saw him. He bought it for her, and gave it to her that afternoon, and she chucked it into the road. My man saw her throw something away, and after she'd gone Peace was looking for it, but my fellow found it—a silver ring with a glass sapphire."

"I give it up," said Alan.

"It must have given him a pain to buy it, anyway," said Baldy. "All that his lady friends get are the things he pinches and can't sell."

"Miss Garden is not a lady friend," said Alan coldly, "and it is ridiculous to refer to her as such."

It was during this more acute period of anxiety that Alan Mainford renewed an old and not a very welcome association. The renewal was brief, and ended for the moment abruptly.

He had worked through a number of attending patients, and now he struck the little bell on the side of his desk. It was the signal for the next, and, he hoped, his last morning patient.

The man who walked in, fingering nervously the brim of a high-crowned bowler hat, looked the picture of health and embarrassment. He had waited for a long time outside the house before he had dared enter; waited whilst patient after patient had passed into and from the consulting room. And now he obeyed the summons.

"Well, what is the matter with you?" asked Alan pleasantly.

And then he frowned.

"I've seen you somewhere."

"Yes, sir—Carton, sir." The man's eyes never left him.

"Carton? Good Lord! You were my servant in my army days, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Carton, and coughed.

"Wasn't there a question of a watch being lost—my watch, in fact?"

"There was, sir," said Carton very respectfully. "It is the one act of my life that I have never stopped regretting, sir. Yielding to a sudden temptation, and having a sick wife——"

"You weren't married," said Alan promptly, and his visitor shuffled his feet uneasily. He had hoped that Dr. Alan Mainford, in his new and engrossing practice, would have forgotten those petty details of a former life.

"When I say 'wife,' sir, I mean sister-in-law. I can only tell you, I've never forgotten my debt to you, and some day I'm going to pay you back."

"And in the meantime?" suggested Alan.

Carton coughed again.

"There's a chance of getting a job and going straight, sir," he said. "A gentleman in the north of England wants a parlour-man—he is a titled gentleman."

"In that case he should have two parlour-men," said Alan sardonically. "You haven't come to ask me to give you a good character, have you?"

Carton obviously had.

"This gentleman's very particular, sir. It would make a big difference to me if you could speak for me."

He gave with every confidence the name and address of his future employer. Alan was staggered by the audacity of the request.

"I remember quite a lot about you now. You've been in prison, haven't you?"

The man nodded.

"How many times?"

Mr. Carton looked up at the ceiling thoughtfully.

"About twice, sir," he said vaguely.

"Once for leaving the house where you were employed with the lady's jewels?"

"They weren't real jewels, sir," Carton hastened to correct a bad impression. "Most of 'em were imitation. I took them away to show my—my sister-in-law—she was very keen on jewels—and I lost 'em on my way back, and hadn't the nerve to face the missus."

All this very glibly, like a man who had well rehearsed his speech.

The young doctor leaned back in his chair, an amused smile in his eyes.

"And now all you want is for me to write to your gentleman and say that you're 'honest, sober and trustworthy'? I'm afraid it can't be done, Carton. I am willing to forgive you the little incident of the watch, which was not very valuable——"

"I only got eight shillings for it," interposed Carton.

"That's too bad! Your respect for me must have dropped to zero! No, it can't be done, Carton. But I'm glad you called to see me. In these days of strain and hysteria it is delightful to meet somebody who has all his nerve! That will do."

Still Carton lingered.

"You don't want a servant yourself, sir?" he suggested.

Alan waved the stem of his pipe towards the door, and Mr. Carton, with a courteous little bow, went out,

a shabby but undefeated man, for he had a friend in Manchester who, for a small consideration, would prepare the most glowing testimonials, all written in different hands upon headed sheets of notepaper, and with every letter went a guarantee that the alleged writer was either dead or living abroad.

As he crossed the street he was looking round for oncoming traffic when he collided with a little man, who scowled at him and demanded in florid language where he thought he was going. He hardly noticed his offensive acquaintance, the only impression that was left on him being that his collision-partner was repulsively and extremely ugly. They stopped in the middle of the road, at some danger to themselves, to argue responsibility, and were parted by a swift-trotting butcher's cart.

"That's a man I never want to meet again," said Carton, addressing his remarks to the first person he met when he reached the pathway.

If he could have foreseen the future he would have said this with greater fervour.

Alan was in some dilemma. He recalled now every incident of the man leaving him. He was treacherous —an unregenerate thief. Nothing was more certain than that he would get his job with forged references— Dr. Mainford recalled the circumstances of Carton's prosecution, and he remembered that forged characters had figured in the evidence.

Yet he was loth, as all decent men are loth, to make life any harder for those who have been under the iron heel of the law. He took up his pen, hesitated for a long time, and then wrote a brief note to the gentleman whose name Carton had given him. He could not let his former servant engage himself in a decent house-

hold without being an accessory before the inevitable crime.

It was a thankless task, as he discovered a couple of weeks later, when he received a haughty letter from the employer, saying that he was perfectly satisfied with Carton's references and with Carton himself, and that it was a pity that he (Alan) had allowed his prejudices over "an unfortunate affair" to take such strong expression. Alan wondered exactly what was the unfortunate affair that Carton had represented to his new boss.

He dismissed the matter from his mind, and never saw his ex-butler again until that fatal night when he drove him from Banner Cross to the railway station.

On the day he saw Carton and wrote the letter he received another visitor; and this one was a little more disturbing. He sent in his card: it bore the name of a Leeds agency, though in what particular commodity the agency dealt was not specified. A young, rather confident man, the caller came quickly to the point. Was a Miss Garden staying in the house, and could he tell him anything about her antecedents?

Alan was too taken aback for the moment to reply.

"I don't understand you. What do you mean?"

"Do you know anything of her past?" asked the caller cold-bloodedly.

Alan got up from his chair.

"Who sent you—Madame Stahm?" he demanded wrathfully.

"I merely want to know——"

"Get out!"

He left hurriedly. An inquiry agent!

CHAPTER XV

THE winter passed; spring came, and the spring of 1876 was a particularly busy one for doctors.

Jane Garden had found her niche. Within a week of furnishing her little home over the stables, Alan had placed her in charge of a serious case in a wealthy family, and thence onwards she hardly spent a week in her little home before she was again sent off on yet another case.

Alan saw her every day, since she was attending his own patients, and in the spring she contrived to spend several Sundays with him, driving through the country.

He saw Madame Stahm very frequently: she was almost a daily visitor to her experimental plant. There were rumours that the new formula she was applying had given successful results, though as yet the product could not be made in commercial quantities. Silver Steel had boldly made an announcement, and had given a date when their manufacture would be on the market; but in neither case had the samples satisfied the experts.

He saw Peace very rarely, heard a little about him from Sergeant Eltham, who, however, seemed less interested in the little man since he and Alan had discussed the odd friendship which Peace was cultivating with Jane Garden.

One blazing hot day in July he saw the little man, dressed in his Sunday best, and with him a woman whom Alan did not remember having seen before. She was young, about twenty-five, fresh-coloured and

rather plump. Her face was bold and with no particularly intellectual expression.

It was a Friday afternoon in a country lane, and his attention was first directed to them—he was resting under the shade of a tree whilst his groom fixed a broken piece of harness—when he saw the little man vault a fence with no effort and collect a handful of flowers. They were not difficult to acquire, for Peace had chosen a nursery garden, and presently the irate voice of the owner or foreman demanded angrily what the intruder was at, and a minute afterwards the lawful custodian of the flowers, a slight young man, came running across the field.

"Put those flowers back where you found them!" he demanded.

By this time Peace was on the lawful side of the fence, but the man had jumped it and was confronting him.

"Put them back!"

The florist caught Peace by the collar. In another second he was hurtling through the air, across a fence, which must have been four or five feet high, and fell with a crash into a glass frame on the other side. Alan got down quickly, thinking the man had been killed, but he scrambled up, his face streaming with blood.

"You dirty little brute, why did you do that?" asked Alan furiously.

If ever he saw death, it was in the horribly distorted face of Charles Peace.

"I'll serve you the same."

The woman screamed and grasped him by the arm, but, shaking her off, he leaped at Mainford. This time, however, he had to deal with a trained athlete and a boxer who had won his way into the Indian Army finals.

Alan stepped aside and like lightning brought his left to the man's throat. He spluttered, gurgled, almost went on to his knees, but he was beaten. He had no heart except for a winning fight; he was incapable of taking one hard blow. From the frenzied murderer he became, of a sudden, the whining supplicant. The change was startling, more than a little revolting. Even the pink-faced woman by his side stared at him open-mouthed.

"What did you hit me for? I'll have the law on you for this!" he whined. "A big bloke like you hitting a little feller like me!"

But Alan was attending to the dazed young man who had been thrown over the fence. Except for two or three cuts on his face he was unhurt.

"If you take my advice you will charge this man. His name is Charles Peace; he is an ex-convict with three convictions."

Peace heard him and let out a howl of anguish.

"Don't do that, mister! Don't let him do that! I'll pay him for his trouble."

He took a handful of coins from his pocket and pressed two or three into the reluctant hand of the injured man.

"You oughtn't to have told him that, doctor—you really oughtn't. It's throwing my trouble in my face—I don't think it's right!"

"What's not right?" asked the woman.

It was the first time she had spoken. Her voice was a trifle thick; her eyes were glassy. Alan took a very uncharitable view of her condition.

"It's all right, my dear. This gentleman knows me. He's a doctor—one of the greatest doctors in Sheffield. If ever you get ill you send for him!" And then, to

Alan, pleadingly: "I'm always saying this about you, doctor, and you go and take my character away because you're a rich man and I'm a poor man. There's no justice—there really isn't—no justice at all."

It occurred to Alan then that this woman knew nothing of his real character, and had probably not heard the unflattering description of her swain. And it appeared that the little man was most anxious that she should not know, for, taking her arm, he hurried her on out of earshot.

"Three quid," said the young man, dabbing his bloodstained face with a handkerchief. "He's got plenty of money—I suppose he's done a burglary."

"Do you know him?"

"Charles Peace? Yes, I know him," said the other. "And he'll know me—I shall carry a mark of his for a year or two. If I'd had an axe I'd have killed him."

"Who is the woman?"

"She's the wife of an engineer. They live next door to one another at Darnall. People say . . ."

He told Alan what people said, and did not err on the side of charity to Mrs. Dyson, as her name proved to be.

"They're as thick as thieves," said the florist. "I'm always meeting 'em together, and other people tell me she goes out with him to music-halls. Her husband's a gentleman, too. What any woman can see in that little fellow . . ."

He left nothing to the imagination.

Alan went back to the victoria that he had recently bought, and drove on to his next patient. He wasn't greatly interested in Mrs. Dyson, or, indeed, in any of the numerous amours of this surprisingly ugly and

unspeakably nasty man. For his part he did not ruminate as to what women saw in men. His experience had taught him the futility of any such speculation.

Peace, except in one important particular, had almost passed out of his life. Mrs. Stahm had become a confused memory. The dead man, Lamonte, was forgotten, even by the jury that had inquired into his death.

He took Jane to the theatre that night, and in the course of the evening remarked upon the shortness of memory.

"I belong to that period, too," she smiled.

"You aren't forgotten: you're very much in the glowing present," he said quietly, "and you're becoming just a little too dominant for my peace of mind."

She shot one quick glance at him, and he saw her colour come and go, but she made no comment until they were walking home after the theatre.

"Am I really worrying you?" she asked.

"Not a scrap."

"Seriously, I mean. Do you think I ought to—do anything?"

"Yes, I think you ought to marry me."

He tried to be nonchalant, but his voice broke.

She did not answer. He thought she quickened her pace a little.

She could have gone through the house to her own rooms, but she left him at the door, taking the carriage way.

"You're not leaving me like that?" he asked breathlessly, and held her hand. "I love you—you know that."

"Do you love Charles Peace?" she asked in a strained voice.

"Charles Peace? For God's sake, what do you mean?"

He heard her breathing heavily.

"I am his daughter," she said, and, tearing her hand from his, she fled round the corner of the house out of sight.

CHAPTER XVI

ALAN MAINFORD stood, petrified with amazement. For a second he could not move. He had read the words "rooted to the spot" before, and they had had no significance for him; but now he knew exactly what the imaginative writers had meant.

Recovering his normal activity, he ran after her, flew up the wooden ladder and reached the landing just as she slammed the door.

"Open the door, Jane."

"Go away."

He heard the break in her voice; she was too near to tears for his comfort.

"Open the door or I'll break the lock!"

The key turned, and he went into the darkened room. She had flung herself on the small sofa, her head upon her arms. He gripped her by the shoulders and pulled her upright.

"Now just tell me what you mean about that piece of nonsense. Is that what has been worrying you all this time?"

"I'm his daughter—isn't it terrible? Isn't it horrible!" she sobbed. "I've known it for months."

Now he understood and a great load rolled from his mind.

"Is that why you have been meeting him?"

She nodded.

"Who told you he was your father?"

She would not answer, and he shook her gently.

"Who told you this lie?"

"He did. It's true, my dear—he knows everything. It couldn't be anything but true. He went by the name of Fenner. . . . Auntie always spoke of the ugly man who was my father, taunted me with it. I knew he was with a circus, but I didn't dream . . ." Her voice broke.

He got from her, sentence by sentence, the story of her youth; of the two parents, who, utterly unsuited to one another, had finally parted; of the scandal; of the abortive divorce case.

"He may have read it."

"He couldn't have read it. He knows the man's nickname—everything."

Alan sat by her side, biting his lips. That the story was a lie he was certain. Who could have primed the little devil with all the details? Then it flashed on him —Madame Stahm.

"Did you ever tell madame the story of your life?"

"No. She wanted to know all about my parents, but I would never tell her. I remember she was very much annoyed and said that she could easily find out if she was curious enough."

He got up and began to pace the room, his hands in his pockets.

"That's where it's come from—Madame Stahm! She has managed to get the story somehow, and has told this little beast, giving him dates, names, particulars, everything."

She looked up at him.

"You don't think it's true?"

"Of course it isn't true!" he scoffed. "Look at yourself in the mirror and tell me if it's true! Orchids grow on muck-heaps, but they're odd kinds of orchids. I'm going to find out the truth about this."

He called that night on a brother doctor and arranged for him to see his patients. Early in the morning he left for Warwickshire. Jane was not at home when he returned, and he was glad, for he had not finished his investigations. They carried him to Leeds, and to the office of the private inquiry agency which had sent its representative to call upon him.

The agency proved to be a very reticent organisation until Alan threatened to make a police court matter of it.

They had been engaged by a client, a lady. (They were discreet to the point of refusing her name, but Alan could guess that.) They had pursued their inquiries, had interviewed the girl's aunt——

"A difficult woman," said the investigator.

"Very. I interviewed her myself this morning—a cat of cats."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," said the investigator.

From this lady they had learned everything they wanted, coloured a little maliciously. The dead scandal had, so to speak, been wrapped in wet moss and its roots still sprouted.

He got back to Sheffield, picked up the girl at the house where she had been attending an elderly lady, who required a companion rather than a nurse, and in the drive home he told her the result of his inquiries.

"It was a lie from beginning to end. Peace was

primed to tell you this foul story, and how like madame to invent it ! I owe her that one. As for Peace, I owe him a very important duty."

She did not ask what it was, nor, when she retired to her lodgings, why he seemed so anxious to get rid of her.

In the hall of Alan Mainford's house was a square, polished board, and, resting on double hooks, were a number of hunting crops. He tried them all, chose one, and ordered the complaining Dixon to bring the victoria to the door.

For three hours he searched various public-houses. It was in Darnall, in a low beer-shop, that he found his quarry and beckoned him out into the street.

Peace was without fear in some respects. He could face the violence of the law and its officers with equanimity. But here he harboured the illusion that it was he who had triumphed and the law which had failed. Now he was face to face with his master, a man physically equal and morally ascendant.

" I want to talk to you, Peace."

They walked along the road in silence, the little man eyeing the hunting crop apprehensively. At a lonely spot Alan stopped.

" Is Miss Jane Garden your daughter ? "

" That's no business——" began the man.

" I want the truth from you. If you lie to me, I'll beat the soul out of you—I may even kill you. Is Jean Garden your daughter ? "

A sudden silence. Alan stood back ; the thong of the whip whistled through the air.

" No ! " screamed the little man. " I was kidding her—that's a joke."

" Madame Stahm's joke or yours ? "

"I don't know nothing about Madame Stahm."

Then, as the crop came up:

"It was the lady's idea . . . a little joke."

"If it's a joke, laugh, you swine!" snarled Alan, and the lash fell.

With a scream, Peace backed against the hedge. His hand dropped to his right-hand pocket. The pistol was half out when Alan struck again and he fell with a sob to the ground.

"I'll never forgive you for that, Peace!" Alan spoke between his teeth. "You're such an ignorant brute that you don't know how beastly you've been."

"And I'll never forgive you either, master"—the little man's face was white with fury. "No man's ever hit me—twice you've done it. Nobody's done it, nobody's dared do it, not screws or anyone! One of these days I'll kill you for it."

And then Alan, who was as great a psychologist as he was a surgeon, delivered his moral *coup de grace.* He knew this man through and through. If he had not known him, Peace would certainly have killed him in his time.

"Some day," he said slowly, "you will be brought into my surgery, or into the hospital where I operate, and I shall remember your threat."

He had touched the real weakness of the man. Peace fell on his knees and clawed at his arm.

"For God's sake don't say that, master! It's cruel . . . it's wicked! Supposed I had an accident . . . got shot . . . you wouldn't do that? You're a doctor, you mean mercy. Tell me you wouldn't do that! . . . It'll haunt me, mister. There ain't a braver man than me, not in the whole world, but that's what I'm always frightened of. That's why I never

touch a doctor's house. I never stole a penny from a doctor in my life. You wouldn't do it, master! You couldn't be so wicked! The Lord would strike you dead if you did it!"

He was almost sobbing when Alan jerked him to his feet.

"Behave yourself, Peace. And take that blow as quits."

The man jerked his head up and down. He was incapable of speech for a moment. When eventually he did speak, his voice was the old familiar whine.

"That settles it—everything. I'll write to the young lady and tell her."

The letter came to Jane the next morning. It was hand-delivered by a little girl whom Alan recognised as Peace's daughter.

"DERE MISS,—it was a jok i never ment abut been yor farthur i maid it up so fergif mi prisumson and parden yor humbel survint.

"Dere Miss, yor farthur i dunt no nore eard of him it was a jok maid up so plese furgif yor obent servint becars i ony ment a jok.

"Yor servint. and humbel,

"CHAS. PEACE."

The girl read the scrawl and, with Alan's assistance, deciphered it.

"Thank God it was a joke!" she said fervently.

"'Jok' is the word you want," suggested Alan.

It was on that day that Peace, after a heated exchange with Mr. Dyson, ended his tirade with the memorable words:

"You don't deserve to have an educated man for your friend!"

CHAPTER XVII

MR. ARTHUR DYSON, the neighbour of Mr. Peace, was dyspeptic, short-tempered, secretive. It was his misfortune that he suffered from a superiority sense, which made him a little unendurable, and certainly had not popularised him either in the surveyor's office at York or in his new post.

Possibly the superiority was based upon his foreign experience, which is one of the most oppressive forms of vanity. Though he was not a talkative man, there were moments when he would hold forth on the advantage of American institutions over British, or, alternatively, the appalling character of the American people. He was the type of Englishman in whom foreign travel creates new standards for disparagement. He was insular, narrow, rather querulous, but above all, secretive. The people who met him, or who worked with him, knew as little about him as his neighbours, or, for the matter of that, his wife.

He never ceased to regard her as a social inferior, and it was generally believed that he had married beneath him. If he had a hobby at all, it was steel. This was a period when almost every other man that was to be met in Sheffield had the germ of a patent in his head, or sketched on paper; patent processes, patent converters, methods of extracting silicon, methods of tempering, strange, weird and possibly expensive ways of manufacture; and in the little club which he

frequented, inventors were as thick as a smoky atmosphere.

He would sit there, pulling at a thin cigar, listening with a knowing smile to the arguments which waged furiously, or be one of the throng which crowded round a table when some triumphant inventor exhibited a model converter that had " come to him " in a flashing moment of inspiration.

Mr. Dyson said very little. He could have said a great deal. It gave him a tremendous amount of satisfaction to know just how much he could say if he so willed. He could tell the stupid engineers, ironmasters and chemists something that would strike them dumb with amazement. He could produce from its hiding-place a phial of pinky-white crystals that would revolutionise the steel industry. And in good time he would.

For the moment he was rather uncertain as to his legal position. He was a cautious man, with a powerful respect for the law. He was all for respectability, desiring the good opinions of his fellows, and this was probably his greatest weakness. For few people are respected by anybody, and honesty is a negative quality. He was regarded as a safe man, quiet and well spoken. His acquaintances said of him that he was " quite the gentleman," which, indeed, he was.

His home life was a continuous strain. His wife, twenty years his junior, was twenty degrees lower in the social scale. He had, he told himself, been deceived by the apparent social equality of all Americans, and had not a sufficient acquaintance with the country and its customs to differentiate between the grades of society which were so subtly but surely separated in the 'seventies.

If he had lived fifty years later he would have occupied a new detached villa, for which he would have paid by instalments. He would have been a member of a golf club, and owned a small car. But the gradations of English society in the 'seventies recognised only two classes: the upper and the lower. The lower middle class was slowly emerging from its parent stem and had not yet split into its multitude of branches and twigs.

It irritated him that he should live, because of his limited means, in a poor-class neighbourhood, the tenant of a cheap house, and have as his neighbours common and illiterate working men. Victoria Terrace epitomised a social dead level. That he should have next door but one—happily separated by empty premises—a horrible little man who followed the trade of picture-frame maker and had, by all accounts, a most unwholesome past, was a source of irritation. He resented Mr. Peace; he bitterly resented his wife's friendship with him. Intermittently he hated the ugly little man who came sidling in at tea-time to have a clean cup set for him. Worst of all, Peace was obviously trying to ingratiate himself into Mr. Dyson's good graces.

He was foul; kept secreted in a pocket a greasy packet of postcards which somebody had brought from Paris. Judged by a later standard, they were no more than indelicate, but the prim male in Mr. Dyson was revolted by the frills and the nudes and the leering smiles of his neighbour as he exhibited them.

"I can't understand how you have that man in the house—faugh!" he said, and opened the window ostentatiously.

Mr. Peace had paid one of his evening calls.

" He's cute," said Mrs. Dyson, " and a gentleman," she added. " I wish I could say the same of you."

" Gentleman—huh ! "

Mr. Dyson put on his carpet slippers and his worn smoking jacket, and took down the meerschaum pipe which he kept on the mantelshelf, and which was reaching a stage of ripe brownness.

" I like him ; he's very clever ; and when a man's clever you can forgive anything," said the woman " A clever man doesn't depend on weekly wages. He'll always earn big money—and spend it."

Dyson looked at her with a cold and unfriendly eye.

" Do you get enough to eat, woman ? " he asked.

" Just enough," she retorted, " and I earn it. I'm a hired help, but I get no wages, and I've got the job for life ! "

" You can go when you're tired of it," he said loftily.

" I'll go just when I want to go "—she did not raise her voice—" I'm a slave here. You never take me out ; I haven't had a dress for six months."

" Ask Peace to buy you a dress."

It was an unfortunate remark. He dodged just in time, and the saucer crashed into splinters on the wall behind his head. In an instant he was on his feet.

" One of these days I'll give you a beating that you won't forget ! " he stormed.

She went out of the room and slammed the door behind her, and was gone a long time. Half an hour passed ; he put down the book he was reading and went out into the garden behind. His wife was leaning on the separating wall, talking to the abominable little man. Peace had a big, green parrot perched upon his

forefinger, and she was laughing loudly at its antics. He called to her; she barely turned her head in his direction. Mrs. Dyson could be very trying.

Peace fascinated her. His repulsive ugliness was almost an attraction. He was a mine of information (mainly wrong) on all sorts of subjects, about which the average man had no knowledge. He could sing; he was an excellent mimic; he could do things with his face that held her in an almost hypnotic stupor. He could recite long scenes from Shakespeare, play tunes of his own composition. One afternoon Mr. Dyson returned home early and found his wife sitting on the sofa, listening raptly to a violin obbligato performed on a fiddle with one string. Even he was held by the wild melody, and did not interrupt. When the tune was finished and Peace was smirking his acknowledgments of her ecstatic praise, the storm broke.

"Get out of here before I throw you out!" He gripped the little man by the arm. Peace very gently pried the fingers loose without an effort.

It was the first exhibition he had given the long man of his amazing strength, and Mr. Dyson was impressed, and his manner became milder. Perhaps he thought that the quality of the little man's music raised him from his lowliness, brought him nearer to the exalted plane on which moved an engineer—a qualified professional man. He was quite affable the next night, and of his own free will invited Peace in to tea. His surrender set a disastrous example. When Mrs. Dyson announced her intention, a little defiantly, of going to Sheffield to see some pictures at a gallery with her neighbour, he did not demur. Thereafter the trips were made without any notification to him.

He was pleased, too, with the almost reverent way

the little man had framed some photographs of his. He told an acquaintance :

" This man Peace is not so bad. He's very common, of course, but he's rather amusing."

The man who finds vulgarity amusing takes two steps down.

She came back occasionally from these trips a little incoherent of speech and flushed of face, too ready at the first hint of reproof to pick up the thing nearest to her hand and throw it at the tall man. Except from the annoying hurt to his dignity, he was glad to see her go out, because he was a great dreamer.

He would go into his bedroom, lock the door, and, opening a bottom drawer, take out a blue octagonal bottle of liniment, corked and sealed. It was not exactly what it seemed. By pulling, the whole base of the bottle came away, and in its centre was a small white phial, also corked and sealed, full of little crystals which rattled musically when the phial was shaken.

He used to muse on this, turning it over and over in his hand, dreaming of a palatial London house, carriages and horses, and a box at the opera. He had other dreams : of a wasted man who died in Cleveland, telling his story with feverish and disconcerting rapidity. Mr. Dyson had learned his French from the dying man. The exercises of his youth, the confusion of irregular verbs, had suddenly become a language, so that he could follow the story that Eckhardt told, could even understand the intricate processes which he described.

Eckhardt had taken a great liking to Mr. Dyson, had probably mistaken his dull silences for wisdom. It had been a fascinating page of life for Mr. Dyson. The golden gates of romance had come ajar and he had

had a peep at shattering visions. In this little phial was all the glamour of buried treasure hunts, of hidden goldfields, without any of the fatigue and expense of the seeking.

In his dreams Mrs. Dyson had no part. She was a chattel, a difficult servant, and no friend. If he ever wanted to take that step he could divorce her. She was degrading him by her association with a man like Peace. . . . But Peace was quite amusing. An ugly little beast, but amusing. Some days he loathed the man, would hardly speak to him in the street, would brush past him with long strides and a gruff " I haven't any time."

There were scenes in the Dyson household ; oppositions of quivering fury ; dramatic gestures ; a sprinkling of bad language ; much broken crockery. He threw a hammer at her and bruised her shoulder. For a week afterwards he had his meals out, and never drank a cup of tea until he had poured out a little in a saucer for the cat, for Mrs. Dyson had talked darkly of prussic acid as a solution to her married misery. And he gathered that she had no intention of committing suicide.

Dyson was proceeding slowly to the realisation of his dreams. He had visited Mr. Wertheimer, a slim, volatile man who did most of his talking with his hands ; so full of energy that he ran where he could have walked, and leapt where he could have run. A clever man, without that divine spark of genius essential to complete success. Mr. Dyson used to spend evenings in the little cottage built within the walls of the Silver Steel factory and talk of Eckhardt, who had once been a personal friend and a daily companion of Wertheimer's. And whenever the little Frenchman

led the conversation in a dangerous direction, Mr. Dyson would temporise.

He released his information cautiously, item by item. They had known one another for three months before Wertheimer had even a hint that the dead man had discussed the formula with his visitor.

Eckhardt never had a chance of proving his crystals. He was taken ill before the new crucibles were laid down ; and, of course, he had no money—not a dollar. The men who intended financing him were ruined in the war—they were on the Confederacy side. Step by step he roused Wertheimer's interest to fever pitch, and then one day he revealed the fact that Eckhardt's secret was in his hands.

" He has made the steel ! Look at that ! "

From his pocket he took a thin strip of steel that had the appearance of silver. Wertheimer seized it excitedly and carried it to the light.

" You have tested it ? It is good ? " he almost shouted, bending the strip backwards and forwards. " You will give me this, that I may test it—— ? "

Dyson shook his head.

" No fear," he said. He almost snatched the strip from the reluctant hand of his host. " I am not a fool. You could analyse that. No, that stays with me."

Thenceforward began a haggling over terms. Wertheimer did not speak for a week. Mr. Dyson sat in his lonely sitting-room with a pencil and paper, working out terms that would be advantageous to himself.

Peace was a being transfigured in these days ; wore his best suit almost every day, and a flower in his buttonhole ; was shaved by a barber and had his shoes polished by a public boot-black. He was in love and exalted in his passion. He also had his dreams : he

would take Mrs. Dyson to Manchester, open a magnificent shop for her, spending as much as a hundred pounds on stock. Owning a shop was, for Peace, the banner of respectability. He had opened many, legitimately and illegitimately; had plans in his head for an eating-house. This probably followed a successful burglary of a Sheffield provision store, the perpetrator of which was never discovered.

("Peace," said Baldy Eltham emphatically, "though it's a new lay with him. Two cases of butter, four hams and a side of bacon. How he got 'em away is a mystery to me. There was no money in the desk, and he couldn't open the safe.")

CHAPTER XVIII

MADAME STAHM had employed the Leeds inquiry agents for many other purposes. The list of her suspects now covered two sheets of paper. She had traced not only the associates but the servants of the traitor Eckhardt. Apparently the man had worked at Birmingham for a year before he went to America, and she was obsessed with the notion that one of these was privy to the very secret she was striving to unearth. Moreover, she had succeeded in insinuating an agent of hers into the Silver Steel works, and from him received bi-weekly reports.

They were very comforting to madame. She expressed her jubilation to her secretary.

"Wertheimer has failed. Yet I have an idea that the formula has been in his hands and that he hasn't had the sense to understand it. This girl of his in

Manchester has studied science. Their correspondence has become more and more vital, and I would like so much to know what he has told her."

"You can't make a second attempt," suggested Baumgarten.

"Why not?" she demanded. "The girl's father is a diamond dealer. The police hardly noticed the loss of the letters; they thought the burglar was after a packet of stones which was in the house. They say that he was disturbed, and think that he took the letters under the impression that amongst them was the packet of diamonds. Why shouldn't he try again? There would be nothing in the house of any value, so there would be no extra guard. I must know what this man is writing to her."

Baumgarten bit off the end of a cigar and lit it.

"We have not seen our dear Charles for quite a long time. Has he made any report about the Dysons?"

A glint of laughter came into the hard eyes of Madame Stahm.

"Not yet. He is making no progress at all, except in the wrong direction. He has fallen in love with Madame Dyson."

Baumgarten leaned back in his chair and laughed softly.

"The rat!" he said. "Has it become serious?"

"As serious as it can become. They write each other letters, they meet secretly, the husband is jealous, our Charles is boastful, but I have learned nothing of Eckhardt which is of importance."

Baumgarten sharpened a pencil with maddening deliberation.

"If the husband is jealous does that seem to you very promising, my friend? Is it not from the husband

all information must be obtained? And if he is antagonising Herr Dyson, he seems to be defeating our ends. Does that occur to you?"

"I don't know," she said. "Peace has been through their house while they were away; he has examined all their papers, and could find nothing directly or indirectly connected with Eckhardt and his experiments."

"Perhaps there is nothing to discover. Who knows?"

That Peace was madly in love, not for the first time in his life, was ludicrously true. That he should choose the man who had flogged him as the recipient of his confidences seemed amazingly impossible.

He came into Alan's surgery about eight o'clock one night, when the last of the patients attending had gone. Alan's first inclination was to kick him out, but the little man, with his ingratiating smile, his cheerful buoyancy and his staggering friendliness, carried too many moral guns.

"I want to see you, doctor. You've always been a good friend of mine" (Alan almost reeled under this shocking accusation) "and I'm in trouble. I always say 'Go to a doctor if you're in trouble, not to a parson.' Doctors are men of the world, parsons know all about heaven and hell and sim'lar fancies, but they know nowt about life."

Alan pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, you unspeakable little blackguard," he said, and Peace grinned and obeyed.

Apparently he was tickled by this method of address, for, when it soaked into his mind, he rocked with silent laughter for fully a minute. When he had recovered:

"It's about a fancy matter. As a matter of fact,

it's a lady. She's one of the most lovely women I've ever seen, or you've ever seen, doctor. There ain't a woman in England, not at Queen Victoria's court or on the theatrical stage, that can hold a candle to her. And she's gone off her head about me."

"You mean she's mad? I can well understand that," said Alan, wilfully dense.

"She loves me and I love her; but her husband can't stand me."

"That is remarkable," said Alan.

Sarcasm was wasted on Peace. He was entirely devoid of any sense of humour, and it struck Alan afterwards that if he had grown mirthful over the gross insult he had offered him when he came into the surgery, it was because he had regarded the description of himself as being grotesquely wide of the mark and overstated.

"This lady—and she is a lady, bred and born——"

"Is she the woman I saw you with?" interrupted Alan brutally. "The woman who was slightly the worse for drink?"

"She drinks very little," said Peace gravely, "and only then for pains in her inside, so you might say it's medicine. You can't deny, doctor, that she's got beauty and grace."

"I do deny it rather emphatically," said Alan. "But don't let that arrest the smooth flow of your ecstasies."

"I don't know what that means," said Peace, a little shortly, "but there she is. And me and her don't know what to do. We thought of running away to America, where she comes from—Cleveland, Ohio: it's near New York."

"And leaving her husband?"

Peace nodded.

"And leaving your wife?"

"She'd be better off without me," said Mr. Peace comfortably. "I'm only a lot of trouble to her. She'd be happier in the workhouse."

The cold-blooded relegation of his responsibility to the ratepayers took Alan's breath away.

"I've given up thieving and burglaring," Peace went on. "I've seen the error of my ways, doctor. I lay awake at night, thinking 'Suppose I died in my sin?'"

He said this impressively. Alan could supply an immediate rejoinder.

"I expect the police are worrying about your *not* dying in your sins! Well, what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to lend me a hundred pounds to pay me fare to America—me and my love," said Peace, and the effrontery of it left Alan helpless.

"Have you asked Madame Stahm?" he demanded.

Peace shook his head.

"I want another hundred pounds from her."

Alan eyed him steadily. He was no longer finding the interview funny.

"I suggest an easy way of getting a hundred pounds," he said. "Mr. Wertheimer offers that amount for any information that will lead to the arrest of the people who kidnapped and killed the man Lamonte."

Peace stared at him blankly.

"Never heard of him."

"You helped to kidnap him. I'm not suggesting that you killed him, but you'll be an accessory before the fact, Peace, if we ever find the murderer. I suggest

to you that you see Mr. Wertheimer, claim the reward, suffer a few years' imprisonment, and come out and live a virtuous life—in America, for preference."

Peace shook his head.

"I've never heard of the man. I wouldn't hurt a fly meself. You won't lend me the money? I thought you wouldn't."

"How right you were!" chuckled Alan. "Is that all you want to see me about?"

"That's all."

Peace put on his old cap and shuffled out of the surgery without any adieu.

Why had he come at all? Not to borrow money. He could not have had a hope of being successful. And if he hadn't come to borrow money, what was the reason for this visit? The psychologist in Alan Mainford examined the situation and found understanding. This little man was genuinely in love. All the extravagant claims he made for Mrs. Dyson he believed and reaffirmed. It so obsessed him that he had to talk about it. When events were on his mind he felt impelled to translate them into words for the benefit of an audience, sympathetic or unsympathetic. He was so much in love with this dreary, commonplace woman that he resented the commission that Madame Stahm sent to him, even though it carried a reward greater than any she had ever paid him before—that very hundred pounds which would transport him to a land where his record was not known.

He met Baumgarten at the rendezvous and complained.

"The Manchester police are after me like a bird after seed," he grumbled. "I dare not stick my nose there. I'm watched day and night. The government

know that I'm one of the most dangerous and cleverest criminals in England."

"Are you afraid that whilst you're away somebody will steal your lady love?" asked Baumgarten tactlessly, and Peace turned on him in a fury.

"Nobody could ever take a lady away from me!" he stormed. "If you think you can, try it! They worship the ground I walk on. I'll smash your face in if you say they don't! You've never been doted on—you don't know what it's like. Women dote on me, and I'm a gentleman to them always!"

Baumgarten reported to his employer.

"This man is getting dangerous. Let me meet him one night and put him out. . . . I could kill him so easily, and it would be fun!"

CHAPTER XIX

PEACE went to Manchester by a new route. He travelled by carrier's cart to Leeds, a long and a tiresome journey which occupied the greater part of the day. Avoiding the main stations, he picked up a slow train, travelled through the night, and reached Liverpool in the early morning. He came from Liverpool by an express that stopped at one station, and stepped out at Manchester Central under the very eyes of the watchful detectives without being recognised.

They saw only an old sailor man who, in place of one hand, showed a stump and a steel hook. He had a seafaring cap on the back of his head and a growth

of grey beard. As he crossed the station, labouring under the weight of a big, white kit-bag, nobody could have imagined that he was anything but what he appeared—one of the hands of a ship that had been paid off at Liverpool. His face was stained a dark brown, as though by a tropical sun, though in reality he owed his rich brownness to the well-applied matrix of a walnut, rubbed on his face between Liverpool and his destination.

Hiring a cab, he drove to a new address, one that he had never used before, and that evening set forth on what was to be the first serious adventure of his life.

Police Constable Cock, who patrolled a beat at Whalley Range, was a man with many enemies. He was, as has been said, officious, and, to a certain class, offensive. Zeal in the performance of his duty had brought him into conflict with the large class which lives on the edge of a criminal career.

There were three brothers who lived in a little hut in a nursery garden; steady men, except when one of them was in drink. Cock, who patrolled near their dwelling place, was their *bête noir*. He had had them in court, and they in turn had offered the usual threats as to what would happen to an officious police constable if he continued to stick his nose into their business.

Of a truth, their business was honest. They were hard-working men, who tied lettuces and picked raspberries in the fields, and went to bed early and rose with the dawn. Of their existence Peace had no knowledge.

He was not concerned with private feuds that night when he dropped over a back wall and made his way to the house that he had burgled before. He had

only one desire, and that was to get back to Darnall and to the woman who had enslaved him and who was now showing a distressing coolness.

It was an August night, rather cool. Rain had fallen, and that was all to the good, for it emptied the streets of possible witnesses by the time the moon " came out." The house from the back was in darkness. He saw no light in the kitchen, but when he made an attempt to force the door, as he had done on a previous occasion, he found it was bolted, and had recourse to the pantry window, that never-failing avenue to illicit gains.

He had an extraordinary memory for detail, observed unerringly that the grandfather clock had been moved from one side of the passage to the other, and that the stairs, which on his previous visit had had a red carpet, were now covered with a carpet of a greenish hue.

The girl's bedroom was locked, but that presented no difficulty. In five minutes he was in the room, and by the shaded light which a candle lantern cast had cleared the bureau of correspondence.

There was no interruption ; he closed the door behind him, went quickly down the stairs, unbolted the back door and let himself out. Very cautiously he came to the front of the house, walking on the grass to avoid the noisy gravel. Although he could see or hear nothing, and there was no apparent danger, he moved stealthily from one cover to another.

There was, it appeared, justification for this, for presently he heard voices, and, peeping over the hedge, saw two policemen and a civilian talking together three houses down the street, and on the opposite side of the road. He saw one of the policemen

go into a garden, presumably to test the door. There was no time to be lost; he vaulted over the wall.

As he did so he saw a policeman crossing the road to meet him, and increased his pace. He heard the scrunch of heavy boots, and a hand gripped him and pulled him round.

"I thought so!" said an exultant voice. "You're the little dog that gave me a punch on the jaw!"

Peace wrenched back, trying to free himself. The policeman was groping for his whistle. Exerting all his strength, he tore himself away. But the man was at his heels. Peace spun round with a snarl. Before him he saw the drab vision of Dartmoor, the loss of liberty, the loss of the woman . . . obliteration . . . a life sentence.

His revolver came up. There was a crashing report . . . another. The policeman staggered. Leaping over the wall, Peace ran quickly round a house, crossed a fence at the back, over a field. He had no remorse, no compunction. He had shot a natural enemy, killed him perhaps, and it did not disturb his night's sleep.

He was back in Sheffield by the following afternoon, having taken a circuitous route. But the real cause of his delay was his efforts to get rid of the walnut stains on his face. In this he was partly successful—Sergeant Eltham saw him in town and noticed nothing peculiar about him.

There was no search for Peace, and for a good reason. When he opened the newspaper that evening he read that three brothers named Harbron had been arrested for the crime and would be charged with murder. The news promised a novel and not unpleasing experience.

" I am going up to Manchester to hear that trial," he said.

Life was becoming a little difficult for him. Madame Stahm was more and more exacting; but her chief offence lay in her vanished interest in Peace the musician. No longer did she call him from his bed to soothe her nerves. Once he had taken his fiddle with him, and had been expressly asked not to play. He was cut to the quick, was almost in tears when he left that grim house.

Mrs. Dyson, too, was hurting him, had grown conscious of her power and was avoiding him, giving as an excuse the jealousy of her husband. Peace had tried to make friends with him, had waylaid him in odd places, forced his attentions upon the thin man, and had been rebuffed rudely. And when he had tried to speak to this bold, pink-faced woman she had met his advances coldly, and her studied politeness developed into recriminations. She could storm like a fish-wife, akimbo, wagging her head in her fury.

" How dare you tell my husband you'll take him out and show him the sights ! " she demanded shrilly. " My husband is a gentleman ! "

" Ain't I a gentleman ? " demanded the little man, tremulous with rage.

" He'll be a rich gentleman, too. He could buy Darnall lock, stock and barrel. He'll be worth millions . . ."

Peace was desperate. Out came that snub-nosed revolver of his; his face was working convulsively, his lips flecked with foam. He had the appearance of a savage dog of an uncertain breed. They screamed at one another like two furies before she went in and slammed the door behind her.

He was losing ground, becoming unimportant. It worried him, set him gnawing his knuckles in the little kitchen which he had turned into a workroom. Not once did he think of the dead policeman and three agonised men awaiting trial for their lives for the crime he had committed. If he read about them, as he did in the newspapers, he took an impersonal interest in the event, and found the satisfaction which is only to be had by the man who has exclusive knowledge, and knows all outside conjectures to be hopelessly wrong.

He had read of the inquest and the account of the police court proceedings, had noticed certain discrepancies which he felt like rectifying. One witness said he saw a dirty little tramp near the scene of the murder. Peace was furious, knowing that it was he who had been seen. But these were the merest sidelights of interest: he concentrated his attention upon the woman who had loved him, spent his nights prowling round the house, peering into windows, overlooking the couple as they sat at their meal, hurtling notes at her, some of which never reached their objective.

He did everything he could to bring her back to him. The heart of the man was wrung with grief in those days. He set his parrot and his canaries on the wall, where she could see them; left in her path significant souvenirs of their secret rendezvous; and when he learned that she was preparing to move away he grew frenzied, attacked the husband in the street and threatened him. The dyspeptic Mr. Dyson, in genuine fear of his life, applied for a warrant. When Baldy came to serve it, his quarry, warned in advance, had gone. It was Madame Stahm who offered him seclusion and sanctuary.

But one night spent in that big house was enough for Peace. He came back to his old haunts secretly. He saw the woman go out and dogged her footsteps, watched the preparations for their departure and decided to trail them.

One night Mrs. Dyson went out and left by train for an unknown destination. Peace came back like a lost soul to the house she had left. He was watching it, brooding on it from a secluded hiding-place, when a cab drove up and a man alighted. Evidently he instructed the cabman to wait farther up the road. He talked to the man for a while, and in the light of the lamp Peace recognised the visitor. Wertheimer!

He became suddenly the bond slave of Madame Stahm, and for once pleasure accorded with duty, for Wertheimer went straight to the Dysons' house and was instantly admitted by a servant, who had evidently been waiting for the arrival of the cab.

A slight mist was rising. If it grew thicker it would be to the advantage of the little man. He slipped round the back of the house and made a brief survey of the situation. The kitchen door was unlocked. The Dysons had an occasional servant, but she was a daily girl.

Slipping off his shoes, he walked into the kitchen, opened the door carefully and listened. He heard the murmur of voices in the front room. To all appearance from the front of the house this room was in darkness. He discovered later that the heavy curtains had been drawn across the windows. The door of the drawing-room was closed and he heard Wertheimer's excited voice:

"... Proof, my friend, proof. ... Always you are telling me, but never you give me proof."

"Wait a minute!"

He heard the high-pitched voice of Dyson and his step as he crossed the room.

Peace had time to shrink under the stair, when the door opened and the man came out. If he went to the kitchen and turned his head he could not fail to see the intruder. Fortunately, he went upstairs, was gone a few minutes, returned again and closed the door behind him, a little carelessly, for the catch did not fasten, and after a while the door moved slightly ajar. Peace crept nearer.

Through this narrow aperture he saw the two men. The room itself was in disorder; the pictures had been taken down in preparation for the Dysons' departure to another house. They sat at the bare table, and the long man, who towered grotesquely above his companion, held in his hand a large phial which was heavily sealed and bore a white label. It contained something which rattled metallically when he shook it.

"Now, I'm telling you," said Dyson. He had a slight American accent. "Eckhardt gave me this a week before he died."

"Why didn't you say so before?" demanded the agitated voice of Wertheimer.

"I wasn't going to show my hand. I made you an offer—you have to trust me——"

"I trust nobody," said Wertheimer, "nobody, nobody! Why should I? She has taken my men, and she has killed them—I know. Am I a fool? Am I stupid? Do I not see? I can trust nobody. If you had told me you had the crystals——"

"I told you yesterday."

"May I have the bottle?" demanded Wertheimer.

Peace saw the tall man draw the phial back.

"No, you can't. I'd look foolish if I let you have the phial. All you'd have to do would be to analyse it, and where should I be? I can give you all the information you want—temperatures, everything. He told me that before he died and I made a note of it, here!" He tapped his narrow forehead.

Wertheimer was half convinced. He looked hungrily at the little bottle which contained all that he had sought for so many years. The crystals were agglomerate, he guessed. There would be half a dozen or more chemical elements that must be separated.

"You have tried to sell to Madame Stahm?"

"I won't deal with her." Dyson's voice was raised haughtily. "Eckhardt told me about her, and I promised him. I'm the sort of man that never breaks a promise. There's my price, Mr. Wertheimer: I want sixty thousand pounds cash, which I'll undertake to put in a bank and not touch. I'll also undertake that if this process does not give you what you want, the money shall be refunded. I can't say fairer than that."

Sixty thousand pounds! Peace gasped. Sixty thousand . . . ! His head swam at the colossal figure. That bottle was worth all that money! Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead as the significance of this conversation slowly began to dawn upon him. He made up his mind quickly. If Wertheimer agreed and carried the bottle away with him, he would take it. If the bottle remained in the house he would take it. Madame Stahm must know.

Dyson crossed the room to close the door. Peace shrank back down the passage and waited in the kitchen, listening to the murmur of voices. There was no need to take any risk. When the door opened, somebody would say something which would tell him all he

wanted to know. He had not long to wait : the parlour door opened again, and he heard Wertheimer's voice :

" . . . not so much money at the bank, but it is procurable. You will see me on Saturday, when I shall arrange."

So the phial was to remain in the house.

Peace slipped out through the kitchen door and regained his place of observation at the front of the house. He saw Wertheimer come out and drive away, and ten minutes after the front door opened and Dyson, in a heavy ulster, came out and walked swiftly in the direction that his visitor had taken.

Peace waited till he was out of sight and worked his way to the back of the house. But now the kitchen door was closed and bolted. With the agility of a monkey he swung himself up to the top of the kitchen, pushed up a sash and was in the house and the Dysons' bedroom in a few minutes.

He was handicapped by having made no preparations for a search. There was a street lamp which afforded a certain amount of light. He dared not put a match to a candle for fear Dyson came back or somebody saw him. He began his search of the untidy bedroom in the half dark, groping beneath pillows, under mattresses, in drawers and cupboards, fumbling through packets and finding nothing.

None of the drawers was locked ; that was an ominous sign. Would the long man have taken the bottle with him ? It seemed possible. Indeed, it amounted to a certainty, he decided.

He crept out of the house the way he had come, closed the window noiselessly behind him, and dropped from the kitchen roof to the ground.

Where had Dyson gone ? He was not a man who

went abroad at night, though he was a member of a political club. All that night Peace hung about, waiting for the tall man's return. When he came, and Peace saw his companion, he knew that for the night no attempt could be made. Walking by Dyson's side, and looking absurdly small, was the bearded Baldy. He was talking loudly. Peace heard his name mentioned as he melted into the darkness.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when he pulled the rusty bell at Brinley Hall. He had had a long and tiring walk; he was hungry; jealousy and cupidity had intensified his natural ferocity. Baumgarten, a man of keen mental perceptions, sensed the mood of the man when he admitted him, and did not attempt to be facetious.

"Madame is in bed."

"Then Madame had better get up," said Peace loudly. "And I want some food and a quart of beer."

Peter Baumgarten was more intrigued than annoyed. He showed his visitor into a small dining-room and, ringing the bell for a servant, gave orders for a meal to be served.

"What brings you out so late to-night, Mr. Peace?"

"'Mr. Peace,' eh?" sneered the little man. "That's not the way you talked to me the last time I was here. Are you going to wake the old girl?"

"Madame Stahm has been informed that you're here. If she wishes to see you she will see you."

They brought in a folding table and opened it before the uncouth figure who sat huddled in a chair. Baumgarten went to his desk; this was his own bureau.

"I've got something private to tell her. She knows me. I don't come out here in the middle of the night for nowt."

He was in his ugliest temper. Baumgarten had never seen him in such a mood before, and wondered what would be the effect one upon the other of this truculent little man and Madame Stahm. All day long she had been moody, difficult to deal with. She had had a fit of hysteria following Baumgarten's very sane revelation that already she had spent more money in pursuing the phantom steel than she could hope to recover in her lifetime.

Whilst he was pondering this matter she swept into the room. Usually she was careful about her appearance, fussed over her toilette for hours. The very fact that she came into the room wearing her oldest dressing-gown was in itself a danger signal.

"What do you want?" she demanded of Peace.

He glowered up at her, his jaws munching.

"Do you think you can come here when you wish, little murderer?"

He thought of a dozen retorts, but offered the only one that was likely to produce a sensational reaction.

"That Dyson has got a bottle of crystals that he's selling to Wertheimer for sixty thousand pounds."

There was a dead silence.

"Crystals? What do you mean?"

Her voice and her manner changed instantly.

"Now, little man, don't be cross with me. I do not like to be wakened up in the middle of the night. What crystals?"

He enjoyed his sensation.

"A fellow gave them to him in America—Eck—something."

"Eckhardt!"

Baumgarten and the woman spoke together. Peace nodded.

"That's what the long fellow said. Eckhardt lived with him."

"I know that," said Madame Stahm. "He is offering them for sixty thousand pounds . . . has he sold the crystals to Wertheimer?"

"No, he hasn't," said Peace. "Wertheimer ain't got the money. After they'd both gone out I got into the house and searched the bedroom, but there was nothing there; no drawers locked, or cupboards or trunks or anything. I didn't lose any time, me lady. When I heard what they were talking about, said I to meself: 'That bottle goes to Madame Stahm.'"

She leaned over and patted his hand, her face beaming.

"Good man! And you got them?"

"No, I keep telling you I didn't get them," he growled. "This fellow must ha' had 'em with him. I waited till he came back, but Baldy was with him, and Baldy carries a shooter."

She said something very quickly to Baumgarten in Russian, and he replied in the same language.

"Now tell me everything, my dear little friend—every word."

Peace had one remarkable gift: his memory was stenographic. What he told his attentive audience now was a faithful record of the conversation he had overheard, adding nothing, subtracting nothing. The woman pinched her lower lip, deep in thought, her eyes fixed upon the carpet.

"He had it all the time, then," she said slowly, "waiting for the moment. That is why he has been negotiating with Wertheimer. He would not come here because Eckhardt made him promise—Eckhardt is a devil, a beast!"

Baumgarten said something else in Russian and she nodded.

"You can get him? You can watch him day and night."

"No, I can't," growled Peace. "There's a warrant out for me. I dare not go near the place. If I could get them to withdraw that it would be easy."

Evidently she knew about the warrant. There must have been something in the newspapers about it.

"You are a little fool to threaten people and to produce your ridiculous revolver in public. You are too free with that revolver. Some day it will bring you to the gallows."

He was in no mood to be told his faults. Rather, he desired a little praise for his enterprise and acumen. He said as much.

"Of course you have been wonderful," she soothed him. "But that bottle of crystals, my friend, that we must have."

Again Baumgarten spoke in Russian, and she replied at some length.

"Very good," she said. "You can stay here, my little dear. I will have a bed made for you, and you shall go out again and find me the bottle and the crystals, and you shall be a rich man."

Peace lay in a bed of unparalleled luxury that night, but he did not sleep. Where had Dyson hidden the phial? He was almost certain that the man had not taken it out with him, that it was still somewhere in that room, in a place easy of access. What had he seen in the room? In one of the drawers he had found an octagonal bottle of liniment; it was securely corked and sealed, a bottle of a popular remedy which could be bought at the chemist's and obviously had not been

opened. He had found a set of surveyors' drawing instruments, an old tobacco jar. There could be no panels in the wall ; the room was papered and the walls were of the thinness one expects in that class of house. Behind the pictures ? Or in the box mattress ?

No, it was somewhere where he could slip it away in an instant, recover it in an instant. He had not been upstairs more than a minute. He had followed Wertheimer out of the house in almost as short a space of time, and even then he had had leisure to lock and bolt the back door.

Peace tossed from side to side all through the night, long after dawn came, thinking over and revisualising every object he had seen in the room, and an idea began to take definite shape in his mind—he resolved to put his theory to the test that night.

He had many friends in Darnall, friends he met frequently, who gave him information as to the activities of the police. One of these he had charged to see Dyson and bring them to withdraw the charge against him.

To say that his neighbours were ignorant of his true character is paying small tribute to their intelligence. Mr. Dyson might suspect, but surely the shrewd Mrs. Dyson knew. Peace was a boaster, a man who could not keep that glib tongue of his from wagging. Mrs. Dyson, in fact, had no doubt as to the truth about the man long before the break came.

Peace managed to convey word to a crony and met him in a field. He gave detailed instructions to the man, who was all too willing to be his agent. At eleven o'clock that night, when most of the shops were closed, there came a knock at the Dysons' door and the tall man answered it. He recognised the neighbour.

" Well, what do you want ? "

He was a man superior to his environment and never lost sight of the fact.

The caller told a glib story. One of his children had been taken ill, and he wanted to know if they had any Selby's Liniment in the house.

" No, we haven't," said Dyson brusquely, and shut the door in the caller's face.

That ruffled man went in search of Peace and told him, and Charles Peace grinned. Now he knew that his guess had been a shrewd one. The bottle contained no liniment, was not even a bottle in the strict sense of the word. There was an aperture in its base, into which a smaller phial might fit. He had seen such things used by people who smuggled narcotics from the Continent. That was where the precious crystals were.

When he went to sleep it was broad daylight, but he slept long and soundly, for he had the contented mind of one who had overcome great difficulties.

CHAPTER XX

THERE came to Alan Mainford's surgery that day, at the usual visiting hour, an abnormally tall man. He had the superior manner of one who desired to be regarded as an equal, and Alan had too large an acquaintance with the type to look upon him as being in any way singular.

His complaint was a prosaic one; a fish-bone had lodged in his attenuated throat, and if he had been enduring a major operation without the employment of anæsthetics he could not have made a greater fuss. Lying on a couch, which his long legs overlapped, he demanded caution, care, particulars of the instruments to be used, the amount of pain to be inflicted, the danger to be faced, the possibilities of complications and after-effects—all this preliminary to the insertion of a mirror and forceps. When the actual extraction began he writhed, gripped Alan's arm, almost swallowed the mirror. Finally Alan went in search of Jane Garden. She was in her room, enjoying a day's rest.

"I've got two yards of childhood on my sofa. He's got a fish-bone in his throat. Will you come and help me? Perhaps your presence will shame him into behaving like a grown-up man."

She put down her book and followed him down the wooden steps into the yard. But her presence had little effect upon the patient, except to increase his alarm, when she was introduced as "Nurse Garden."

"My God, is it as bad as that?" he asked, hollowly.

"Do you think you ought to see another surgeon, doctor?"

"I've brought this lady here," said Alan wearily, "in the hope that you'll be so heartily ashamed of making a fuss in a woman's presence that you'll let me do this simple little job—it isn't even an operation."

It was a quarter of an hour before he grabbed the end of the bone and brought it to light.

"Thank God that's over!" said the visitor, mopping his brow. "Dyson's my name. I'm an engineer up at the L.N.E. I'm not used to English surgeons; I've been in America for some time. The surgery is more up-to-date there."

"Do they swallow fish-bones in America too?" asked Alan innocently.

"I don't know whether they swallow fish-bones," said the other stiffly, "but they know how to take them out. What is your fee?"

"I shall charge you nothing," said Alan; "the experience has been worth the money."

His visitor evidently had little sense of humour. He also had no regular medical attendant, he confessed. What was very apparent was that he had been very frightened and very much shaken by this little inconvenience. Alan bade him sit down for a little while before he went out, and brought him a brandy and soda. Under the influence of the stimulant he relaxed, and though he was not usually a talkative man, and his pomposity was a little irritating, he became quite interesting on the habits and customs of the native-born American.

"In Cleveland I had a wonderful home. It's quite different here. A slum, sir, with the most dreadful people for neighbours. There is no accommodation

in Sheffield for a gentleman of limited means : he must either herd with the swine or go out into the country, which is extremely inconvenient, although naturally I should have a free pass over the railway. Are you interested in steel ? "

Alan was not interested in steel.

" I have a slight interest in a patent converter," began Mr. Dyson.

Alan laughed.

" It's difficult to meet anybody in Sheffield who hasn't a slight interest in a patent converter," he said. " You can't get into the Patent Office for the crowd. Everybody in Sheffield is inventing something, if it's only an excuse for not paying their doctors."

" If——" began Dyson, his hand moving towards his pocket.

" That was a tactless remark, but I am not your doctor ; and it is notorious that the good Samaritan had no pay for his service. All the bad Samaritans, one presumes, charge double."

He had Mr. Dyson at sea here.

Just as he was going, the tall man—he must have stood six feet six in height—asked casually :

" I suppose you wouldn't know—no, of course, you wouldn't."

" I wouldn't know a converter from a crucible, if that's what you were going to ask me."

" No, I was not," said Mr. Dyson testily. " You've told me you know nothing about steel—that is sufficient. The man I was going to mention is a person called Peace."

" What—Charles Peace ? " Alan's eyebrows rose.

" Do you know him ? "

" In a sense I know him," smiled Alan. " I had the

satisfaction of horsewhipping him the other day, and on a previous occasion I had the great pleasure of knocking him down in the presence of his fair but inebriated lady friend."

Dyson blinked at this.

"You knocked him down? Was that about . . . ?" He gave a date, and Alan, considering, nodded.

"Did he throw a man over the fence into a glass frame?"

"Oh! You saw it, too, did you?" asked Alan.

"No, sir," said Mr. Dyson. He had become suddenly very stiff. "The lady—um—was not his lady friend, as you call it; she was—um—my wife." He coughed.

Alan was momentarily embarrassed.

"When you say she was—um—inebriated——"

"I mean, of course, that she was overcome by the heat," said Alan.

The tall man considered this for a long time, staring gloomily at the carpet.

"She is a good wife, but a little—um—wilful. It is a great mistake to marry, as it were, beneath one. Classes should not mix. I am moving my home in consequence. It is—um—very unfortunate."

He paused again. Alan was at a loss for words, excuses, pleasing lies. He also maintained a silence which had in it the quality of discretion.

"But she was not inebriated. Good-morning."

"An extraordinary man," said Jane, when he rejoined her in the sitting-room.

"A friend of a friend of Peace, he said, but not, I gather, a personal friend of Peace. Mr. Dyson—I've got an idea I've heard about him. He's so tall he had to have a special desk built for him."

CHAPTER XXI

In the evening business took Peace to Banner Cross, and here he had a shock. Almost the first person he saw when he reached that suburb was Mr. Dyson. There was no mistaking that lanky man ; he towered above all other pedestrians. Mrs. Dyson was trotting at his side, a subdued but rather dignified Mrs. Dyson, conscious of her coming wealth and position, fearfully anxious perhaps to end a friendship which was proving as dangerous as it was distasteful.

They turned abruptly and went into a house. The " To Let " signs were still pasted on the windows. This was where they were moving, then. Peace noted the house, and, making his way back to the region of Darnall, met his wife and made secret arrangements for moving his home to Hull. Obviously he could no longer stay in that neighbourhood unless the warrant against him was withdrawn.

The Dysons' house at Darnall was dark, untenanted. Somebody told him that the moving had not begun. He went round to the back, found the kitchen window open and got inside. The furniture was packed up ready for removal. The bed in the front room had been taken to pieces, and was a disordered litter of iron laths and rolled mattresses. He saw that the dressing-table had been moved, and his heart sank. Pulling open drawer after drawer, his fears were realised ; the contents had been taken out. The bottle was probably in Dyson's pocket at that moment.

If he could see the woman, have a few words with

her, his quest might be simplified. But he dared not show his face in daylight—not in Darnall.

He slept in the town that night and was at Banner Cross early in the morning. He even went into the house to reconnoitre before the furniture van arrived. After a few hours it came. Mr. Dyson had a day off from the office, arriving genteelly by cab. Peace waited till the man had gone in, then made his bold move. The woman heard her name called and turned with a frightened start.

"What are you doing here?" she quavered. "You wicked man . . . don't you know there's a warrant out for you?"

"There'll be a warrant out for you, me lady," he said unpleasantly. "I want you to help me—get him to go to the police and withdraw that summons."

She looked round fearfully; her husband was not in sight, but there were curious spectators, some of whom must have recognised Peace. She had made a solemn vow to her husband that she would never see the man again.

"I can't; he wouldn't do it."

"Suppose I show him the letters?"

Her eyes opened wide.

"Have you got them? You said you burnt them!"

Peace grinned.

"It doesn't matter what I said, I've got them all right. Suppose I show him those little notes that the grocer's boy brought, eh? That'll make him sit up! And you too. See me to-night."

"I can't," she said desperately. "Be reasonable, Charles."

"Don't call me Charles; my name's Mr. Peace," he said bitterly. "After all I've done for you, the

Suppose a man were an atheist ? They'd no right to bring religion into it without a prisoner's permission. And suppose he were a foreigner, how about his country then ? Peace invariably argued matters like this.

The men in the dock interested him : big, ungainly fellows, obviously distressed by their position. He was curious to know what circumstances had brought them there. It was a great lark, sitting up in the gallery, elbows on the ledge, chin resting on the back of his mittened hands, watching two men being tried for a murder which he had committed ! He felt no compunction, no pity, no uneasy stirring of conscience. He was impatient to know how the police had pieced together this charge against them. Lies, of course—the police always lied. They were never happy unless they were getting some poor bloke into quod. But what kind of lies ?

He sat immobile whilst the opening counsel eulogised the devotion and patriotism of the dead policeman. How did the prisoners come into it ? He learned very soon. There had been a police court case against them ; they had threatened the dead man in the hearing of landladies and barmaids and casual drinkers at the pub which they frequented. They were poor men : two of three brothers, who lived in a hut planted in the middle of a fruit garden owned by a nurseryman. Nobody had seen them shoot the man, but there were the footprints.

A pompous and completely self-satisfied inspector produced the boots. Peace knew that thousands of men were wearing boots of a similar pattern, with exactly the same number of nails, but the jury were impressed. He was highly dramatic, this police

inspector; described his deductions, how he rushed into the hut where the prisoners were sleeping, how, with great prescience, and before he knew anything about the footprints, he had taken the prisoners' boots away; and the jury were more impressed.

The judge was nervous; a new man to Peace, obviously inexperienced. He had not even the courage of other people's convictions, for he vacillated, disagreed with both counsel in turn, and offered conclusions which were acceptable to neither.

Day after day Peace listened, until there arrived the fatal moment when the black cap was spread on the judge's head, and, in sober terms, he sent one of the brothers to the scaffold and one to freedom.

"I don't believe he done it."

The member of the public who offered this opinion to his fellow occupant of the public gallery was Mr. Charles Peace.

"I think," said the man to whom he addressed the remark, "they all ought to have been hung—all three of 'em. There's too many Irish in Manchester."

He was a typical member of the great proletariat.

Peace was very impressed and moved, for he had never seen a murder trial before. The inspector, who happened to be in the court, met him as he emerged and asked him his impressions.

"I don't think he done it, sir," said Peace again.

"Can you suggest who did?" asked the other sarcastically. "You wouldn't like to say that you did it, would you?"

Peace shook his head.

"Human life is sacred to me, sir," he said. "I've never hurt a fly."

"I'd like to hear what the flies say about that before I believe you," said the officer.

Which, as Peace said, was ridiculous, for flies can't talk, unless their buzzing is a language.

CHAPTER XXII

His stay in Manchester had not been unprofitable. There were others who were less fortunate. The man who had sat next to him on the first day confessed to him over a pot of beer and some bread and cheese that he was on his beam-ends. He was a very respectable-looking man, smooth-faced, deferential, nicely spoken. He had been a butler in a noble family at St. Anne's. Butler-like, he put this interpretation upon his employment. He had, in fact, been a parlour-man to a wealthy Liverpool shipbroker, who, in some mysterious fashion, and for services which were rather obscure, had received the honour of knighthood. He had left because he couldn't stand her ladyship.

All this he said over the first lunch. At the second Peace heard more of the truth. The handyman had left in a hurry, and his exit had been accelerated by the toe of the broker's boot. There was a little silver missing, not enough to justify a prosecution. There was a weeping housemaid and a furious mother to be appeased. The broker knight very generously said that the girl could come back and resume her employment after it was all over.

Peace had no patience with liars, and, once he had discovered a discrepancy, was not satisfied until he had the stark truth. But he liked the man; he was well

spoken, a gentleman ; more of a gentleman than Mr. Dyson. He might be extremely useful. Peace pigeonholed him for future reference, asked questions about the house, the quantity and quality of the silver, the method of safeguarding the household treasures. Was there a dog ? The pantry window, now—did it have all those silly bars in front of it ? All of which the ex-servant answered to Peace's satisfaction, but added information which was less entertaining.

" The governor's a great pistol shot," he said. " The walls of the library are covered with prizes—a left-handed shooter. I've seen him hit a sixpence when it was tossed in the air. He's got seven revolvers in the gun-room, all of them presented to him . . ."

Peace changed the subject and lost all interest in the broker knight and his indubitable treasures.

It was on his advice that Carton—that was the name he gave—came with him to Sheffield.

" I know Sheffield—I used to work for a gentleman."

" He must have come to Sheffield when I wasn't there," said Peace sarcastically.

Until this moment Peace had been very reticent, had spoken scarcely at all of himself. On the journey, warming to the companionship and sympathy of his new-found friend, he told the story of his life, his loves, and some of his adventures. He explained his importance, hinted at wealthy friends ; but always the subject came back to the chatelaine of a newly rented house in Banner Cross.

" I've only got to lift me finger and she'd leave her husband to-morrow. She's always saying ' Charles, take me away.' Wants me to open a shop in Liverpool. A lady, mind you. There ain't a prettier girl in England."

"This girl I was telling you about——" began the ex-butler.

"It's funny how women dote on me," Peace went on. "There was a girl in Hull that used to follow me about the streets like a dog. I had to stop her. I said: 'It's not ladylike.' When I got up in the morning she'd be sitting on the step, waiting for me to open the door. She was one of the most beautiful creatures you ever saw; rather a stout girl with red hair. I never did like thin women."

"This girl I was telling you about——" the butler began again.

"I've broke up more homes than any man you could name," said Peace. "I've never wanted to—I'm a God-fearing man. There's a woman up in Manchester who committed suicide because I wouldn't talk to her—as pretty as a picture, she was, and her husband was a titled gentleman. There's a ladyship down in Sheffield that cries if I don't go and see her."

"This girl I was talking about——" said the butler for the third and last time.

"It's something in a man," said Peace. "It's not his looks or his age or his height, it's his spirit."

"I daresay," said the butler, relapsing into baffled silence.

When Peace reached the house of call where messages were left for him, he received an urgent summons to attend upon his wealthy employer. He had only five minutes to reach the place where the victoria was waiting, but he might have been more leisurely if he had foreseen the slowness of that drive. A heavy fog had settled on the countryside, and the horses moved at a walking pace almost throughout the whole of the journey.

He did not go to the Hall. Half-way from Sheffield a big cottage stood back from the road. To Peace's knowledge it had been unoccupied for four years and was reputedly haunted, since its previous owner had hanged himself in an outhouse. Before this habitation the victoria stopped.

" The lady's in there," said the coachman, speaking with some difficulty, for he had a very slight knowledge of the English language.

Peace got down grumbling, opened the gate, walked down the flagged path and knocked at the door. It was Baumgarten who admitted him.

" You're late, my friend," he said, and closed the door.

Then, taking the little man almost affectionately by the arm, he led him into a large front room, which smelt musty and was only half furnished.

" Madame Stahm will be down in a little time," he said. " She has taken this cottage to be nearer to the works. Also "—he looked Peace straight in the eyes " to make a home for a little friend of ours who may find it convenient to be a long time absent from Sheffield."

" Me, do you mean ? " asked Peace in surprise.

Baumgarten nodded.

" We have heard of your sufferings and the trouble you have had with the police, my poor friend."

His sympathy was entirely spurious, but Peace, for all his peculiar perceptions, was impervious to sarcasm, and seldom recognised it. On the other hand, he was ready to accept even oblique tributes to his importance.

" Madame bought the house for a few hundred pounds. There are provisions here ; these will save

you the trouble and risk of going to the shops. If you could think of a man who would act as servant here without exciting the suspicion of the police, that would make it easier."

"Don't talk to me about servants," said Peace, roughly. "What's the lay? You mean I've got to stay here till things blow over? Suppose the police came?"

"This is the last place in the world they would think of searching."

The little man looked around uneasily.

"I don't see through all this gammon," he said. "The police warrant is nothing. I'm going to get the lady to withdraw the summons. What can they charge me with? Nothing!"

"The police warrant is unimportant," said Baumgarten. "What follows may be another matter. We are prepared for all emergencies. Above this floor"—he pointed upwards—"is a little attic. Nobody would dream there was an attic there at all. You might hide there for years and nobody would suspect. If you had a friend who could act as servant it would be all the easier—I am thinking only of your convenience."

The nimble mind of Peace went immediately to his newest acquaintance—Carton, the ex-butler. But such a man could only be trusted to a limited degree; to what extent must he be taken into his confidence?

"What do you want me to do—is it the bottle? That's easy. I'll do that job any night, and I'll defy the best copper in Sheffield to say it was me. I don't want a servant for that, do I?"

There was a rustle of silk skirts in the hall.

"Here is madame," said Baumgarten.

She came in, radiant, both hands outstretched.

Peace had never received such a welcome in his life, and was embarrassed.

"My little friend, you don't know how we have wanted you! Have you brought your fiddle? No? That will do some other time. Sit down. Do you like your new home?"

The words gave him a new interest in the cottage—a proprietorial interest that was novel and pleasing.

He looked around him. He had never occupied such a house as this. It was too big, too much fresh air in it perhaps, and for this reason the prospect of settling in an establishment of this size was not perticularly alluring.

Also, his mentality was such that he could only appreciate that which was hardest to come by. He could spend a night stealing trumpery articles of jewellery and find a great contentment in exaggerating their value, deceiving nobody but himself. The gift horse became almost automatically a thing of flaws.

"My wife wouldn't like it——"

"Oh, la! Your wife! Do I ever speak of your wife, little friend? To me you are singular; you have no bonds or chains. This is for you alone."

She turned to Baumgarten.

"Did you tell him?"

He shook his head.

"Only that this would be a good place to hide."

"But why he should hide?"

"No," he said shortly.

She sat down opposite Peace and leaned towards him, dropping her voice.

"Those crystals you spoke of, they are life and death to me! I must have them, you understand? Yes, yes, I know you are so clever that you would take

them from under his nose and nobody would be the wiser. But you must *take* them—you understand? You must go to every length."

"What's that?" asked Peace, puzzled.

"You must, if necessary, kill him," she said calmly. "but that bottle must be put in my hands before the end of the week. Also, this man has a small piece of steel. That also I must have."

She leaned back.

"For this I shall pay you two thousand pounds," she said.

Two thousand pounds! The little man's head reeled. To him the limit of extreme wealth was a hundred. He had never possessed as much at any one moment, though he had stolen property of twenty times the value. "Two thousand sovereigns in a bag—almost as much as you can carry, little man. That is the price I will pay. This small house"—she made a gesture of contempt—"that also you can have; it is of no value to me. There must be no ifs or buts or whys or whens. By Saturday those crystals must be had. Listen, my ugly dear; there is a man in Sheffield, a bad man, a fool. On Saturday he will have money to buy these things, and we shall lose them. You remember the factory where you found poor Lamonte—alas! he is dead."

"I didn't kill him," said Peace quickly. "I hit him a clip on the jaw, but that didn't do him any harm."

"Let us forget that. You remember the place?"

He nodded.

"I know Wertheimer's place. You want me to go there?"

She shook her head.

"Not yet. It may be necessary. I may want you

to go over that wall. But if you're clever and quick it will not be necessary."

He rolled his ugly little head from side to side.

"I'll get that bottle for you—to-morrow, perhaps. They've moved their house—the Dysons."

"Yes, I know that. They have gone to Banner Cross. At the moment he is not attending at his office—this man Dyson. He is waiting whilst Wertheimer arranges the money. He never goes out of the house, but spends his time in his room, where he has a double-barrelled shot-gun."

"How do you know this, ma'am ?" demanded Peace in amazement.

"Do not let us talk about how I know, or why I know," she said impatiently. "That is the truth. At all costs you must get what I want. To-night you must go out and make inquiries—only to inquire ; you must not do anything premature."

He sought an explanation. "Premature" was a foreign word.

"Before the right time, I mean. And the right time is not to-night. Have you a friend you can trust ?"

Peace hesitated. He trusted nobody. Carton was down on his luck, and it tickled his vanity to be in the position of a patron who could offer him work. He, Charles Peace, with a butler ! He chuckled at the picture he conjectured.

"All right, your ladyship. I might as well stay here now, I suppose ?"

"There is food in the house—biscuits, canned meat, flour, everything. You can live here even with the house shut. But then the police would search it. It is very necessary you should have a servant."

The mention of the servant reminded him that he

would have to return to Sheffield. It was a long walk, but walking would be almost as quick a method as driving on a night like this. At the same time, locomotion might be a difficulty, and he made a tentative suggestion to Baumgarten, and to his surprise, though the scheme entailed considerable outlay, it was accepted.

CHAPTER XXIII

AFTER Madame Stahm and Baumgarten had departed he set out alone, carrying a candle-lamp, and picked up Carton at an agreed rendezvous. To him he put the plan and an offer of employment. The wages he could not specify.

"I don't care what they are," said the ex-servant, "so long as I get food and lodging. I haven't enough to pay for either."

Peace left him, after arranging that they should meet later. Going on to Banner Cross, he reconnoitred the position. There was no lights in the darkened house, but, creeping close to the window, he listened and heard voices, both raised in acrimony. What they said he could not distinguish. Then apparently Mr. Dyson did not spend all his nights in his own room, and he would hardly carry a shot-gun round the house.

He examined the fastening of the kitchen window and made a survey of other means of entry. Satisfied, he went back to the town, joined his chilly companion and with him trudged out to their new home.

"There won't be much walking," said Peace.

"I'll be having my own carriage and pair next week —mark my words!"

On the way the ex-butler became more expansive, unreeling yet another length of his picturesque past. He had been in prison at Strangeways for obtaining a berth with forged references; he had also been in Chatham and Maidstone prisons.

"You're a low character, then?" said Peace virtuously.

The man said he liked Chatham Prison, and added inconsequently that he was a Kentish man.

It was difficult to believe that this smooth-faced, nice-spoken gentleman who walked by Mr. Peace's side was an ex-convict, a gaol-bird. Peace was a little shocked and more than a little relieved. On the way he outlined his plans. He was doing some work of a very secret and important character. It was quite honest, but the police wouldn't like it, and so it might be necessary for him to lie up in the cottage for a few days.

"You'll be there, looking after the place, to answer the door and say that the owner hasn't moved in yet. If you sell me I'll shoot you stone dead."

"I've always been honourable in dealing with any friends who trusted me!" said Mr. Carton indignantly.

"Perhaps you never had any friends who trusted you," said Peace, and was painfully near the mark.

He would be useful as a cover on the night when Peace made his attempt. He had already conceived alternative plans, one of which he was sure would be successful.

In the afternoon he gave his "servant" further details and Mr. Carton realised that the secret mission

in which he was to assist had all the appearance of a vulgar burglary.

Peace could draw a plan remarkably well, and he reduced the topography of Banner Cross to paper.

"Here's the house, and there's the field opposite, where you'll stay and watch out. If you see a slop, you whistle. I'll get to you, whatever happens, and give you the bottle. You stick it in your pocket and make your way back to the cottage. If I'm caught and searched, there'll be nothing on me, see?"

"What bottle? A beer bottle?" asked Carton, mystified.

Peace eyed this disturber of his romantic dreams with some malignity.

"A medicine bottle about so big. And don't ask questions. People who work for me ain't expected to ask questions. And don't try to shop me. I killed a feller once—he shopped me. The police don't know that."

He loaded his revolver with great deliberation under the awed eyes of his assistant.

"You're not going to use that, are you?" said the man, in alarm. He had all the normal criminal's horror of firearms. Peace took his perturbation as a compliment.

"I keep it in case of accidents. If I go up, I go up for life—I'd sooner be hung. That's why the police are frightened of me; that's why they never tackle me! Go down to Scotland Yard and see my record; you'll see on it 'Dangerous; carries firearms'—that's me. When I'm in prison it's 'Mr. Peace this' and 'Mr. Peace that.' Even the screws daren't offend me. I escaped once.[1] I tell you, it makes a few screws

[1] This is partially true. He succeeded in getting out of his cell, but not from the prison building.

tremble in their shoes when they hear Charlie Peace is inside——"

"I've heard about you," said the man respectfully.

"Of course you have! I've done two sixers and a four. I've been in every prison in England. They don't keep me long, they like to push me off to another governor. I give too much trouble. I've heard screws say: 'You have him, I don't want him!'"

"It's the same with me," said Carton, in a moment of reckless emulation, but this self-testimony to his bad qualities was coldly received.

"Don't talk so much about yourself," snarled Peace. "I hate a chap who's always boasting!"

He was reconciled to his new home, and had shown the man over the house with all the aplomb of a proprietor. Also he had inspected the windows and found them good. There were folding shutters, and, in addition, the curtains which covered them were heavy and light-proof. Over the front door was a transparent circular fanlight, which Peace, curiously enough, called a transom, a word generally used in America to describe that form of illumination. He had never been to America, but had probably got the word from a fellow convict during his sojourn in Dartmoor.

There were no curtains to this, and he spent an evening making it impossible for light to shine through.

Every window in the house was covered. An inspection of the attic, which was to be his place of refuge in case of danger, revealed that it was admirably approached through what looked to be a cupboard in one corner of the upper room. From here a flight of stairs led to the attic proper. It had no window, but in the roof was a circular skylight which could be raised or lowered, and was not visible from the road.

A hinged wooden lid, which could be buttoned or bolted, covered this from the inside, presumably as a protection against burglars, but providentially from Peace's point of view, since he could have a light in his oddly shaped apartment.

There was plenty of space. A bed had already been erected; the mattresses and blankets lay on the ground. For some reason or other it had received recent attention from the former owner of the cottage. The walls had been newly papered, and he found carpenters' tools here, which he appropriated. The hammer and nails, which were subsequently found, were on a shelf too high for him to detect.

He spent some time arranging the entrance to the lower bedroom so that it had the appearance of a cupboard, and he was again fortunate, for he found in one of the bedrooms a number of old dresses that had been left behind by the previous occupant. These he hung on strings behind the door at the foot of the stairs, so that when the door was opened it had all the appearance of being a very ordinary clothes closet, and the illusion could, he saw, be heightened.

He took a rough measurement, went out into the kitchen and came back carrying the coal-cellar door. It fitted exactly, and he propped it up against the wall for use in an emergency.

Carton made tea and they discussed their plans for the night. Peace was something of a general; he had certainly the gift of direction; and though Carton was apparently a stupid man, he could repeat instructions without a flaw after an hour's tuition.

"But I don't understand what's in that bottle. Is it drugs?"

"It's a curio," said Peace, "worth nothing to

anybody but the owner. I wouldn't pinch it, but this man's given me a lot of trouble. He's a fellow that had a warrant out for me. It's highly valuable, but you couldn't sell it—and you're getting a twenty-pun' note for the job."

Carton was impressed.

"You're not going to take a shooter, are you?"

"Mind your own business," growled the other. "I'm taking you, and if you're a shooter I'm a Dutchman!"

He had his own private affairs to set in order. His family did not worry him very much, for he had moved them into Hull, where an eating-house had been opened for them. Hannah, his wife, had to be financed through some circuitous channel which would betray neither his identity nor his location. He sent two five-pound notes by post, enclosed in a half sheet of paper, "From a true friend." Hannah would know him by this strange title.

The bank notes came from the pocket-book of a wealthy-looking man who had come on to the platform at Manchester to see off some relations. Evidently one was his daughter, going on a holiday or to school. When he took out his pocket-book with a flourish, extracted a crinkly note and handed it to the girl, Peace made a mental note. He went along the platform to get a paper, and was reading it as he passed the prosperous owner of the pocket-book. So absorbed was Peace in his reading that he ran into the gentleman. He apologised humbly—the owner did not miss the money until he was home again. Peace had slipped the pocket-case into Carton's pocket until they had passed the station barrier, when he retrieved it—all without the knowledge of his companion.

The numbers of the notes had probably been taken and circulated—that would be bad luck for Hannah. But, anyway, she hadn't pinched them, and "From a true friend" was surely an alibi?

He had a daughter, but this young lady did not occupy any considerable portion of his thoughts, no more, indeed, than did his lady wife. He could have wished that he had entirely obliterated Mrs. Dyson, but she persisted. She had given him some quality that he had never known before. There was a fragrance and a beauty in her association that had been foreign to him, and the thought that he was losing her was his only sorrow.

Yet he was a dreamer of dreams, could visualise himself returning at some distant day, immensely wealthy, respected by his fellow citizens, riding perhaps in the mayor's carriage, and exchanging jokes with good-natured inspectors of police who had been mere constables in his day. Perhaps giving a dinner at the Grand. Though the constables might age into portly officers, Mrs. Dyson and he remained the same, in these visions of his, though she was perhaps a little more etherealised. She would ride by his side, holding his hand in hers, as she did that day when they drove out into the country for the first time together. A clammy hand, hers, but it was the kind of hand that Peace could not imagine on any lesser woman. She had qualities the thought of which made him shiver. He hoped he would see her to-night, that she would listen to one last appeal.

Just before they left the cottage an idea struck him, and, excusing himself, he went back to the room where he was to sleep that night, shut the door, and, kneeling reverently by the bed, said his prayers. God and Mrs. Dyson became oddly associated in that confused

supplication. Peace felt all the better for his spiritual efforts.

He had a collection of prayers, written down on little sheets of paper, which he claimed he had composed, but which were obviously memorised from innumerable prison church services. Once he said he was called upon to preach to his fellow prisoners, but he never repeated that assertion.

He stopped to drink a little weak brandy and water, and stepped out into the mirk, where his shivering companion was waiting. It was not cold enough to justify the teeth-chattering of Carton.

For a long time they walked in silence, then Carton spoke nervously.

" I suppose there's no danger to-night ? "

" Depends on what you call danger," said Peace tartly. " What are you worrying about ? Nobody's going to touch you—you're not going into the house to meet a man with a double-barrelled gun, the same as I am. You're not going to risk your life, as I've done hundreds of times, and only got fourpence-ha'penny for me trouble, which happened to me in Durby, and in a house you'd think was full of money—fourpence-ha'penny ! "

" I'll bet you laughed ! " said Carton.

Peace scowled at him.

" Why should a man laugh when he expects hundreds of pounds and only gets fourpence-ha'penny ? " he demanded angrily, and there was logic in his wrath.

Carton did not understand him, and was already under the spell of terror that the man exercised. He wished he had never " taken up " with this dangerous creature, that he had tried a new trick of making money that he had worked out when he was last in prison. It

was too late now. A straight-out burglary—the thought made him cold. Inside jobs he understood, but to go in from outside, to explore a strange house where people were sleeping that might wake—that was a nightmare.

And the shooter. . . .

Suppose Peace used the revolver, that would be hanging dues for everybody. He had sat through the Manchester trial and had seen the black cap go on. . . . He broke into a cold perspiration.

CHAPTER XXIV

Two thousand pounds! That was the golden vision that swam before the little man as he trudged through the drizzle. Two thousand pounds! An incredible sum. There were lords in the land who hadn't that much. He was going to get it, Dyson or no Dyson.

His confederate would perhaps take the punishment. He did not like Carton, he decided. He was a coward, full of complaints. One concession he made to him. As they reached the outskirts of the town he allowed his companion to take a 'bus directly to Banner Cross. Peace could not be seen in Sheffield; he must go by a more circuitous route to avoid the unpleasant possibility of meeting a policeman.

Before they parted he gave very elaborate instructions as to where they were to meet. Peace had his own plan. The first thing he must do was to establish the reason for his return—his personal feud against Dyson must be his excuse. He hoped he would see somebody who knew him, so that he could discuss

that aspect. If he could get the small bottle without being detected, there must be a good reason for his being in the neighbourhood. If the worst came to the worst, the police warrant would bring him no more than six months' hard labour, and he could do that on his head. But that must be his excuse.

There would have been no necessity to explain to the neighbours in Darnall why he was returning. The Dyson affair was common property. Women stood at their doors and shook their heads when she passed, and looked at one another with meaning glances when she was near. She was a terrible example of a so-called lady, for all respectable women to study as one studies the habits of unpleasant insects.

Two thousand pounds! Suppose you put two thousand sovereigns in a row, how far would they reach? Over a thousand inches . . . twenty-six yards. He stopped under a lamp-post in a deserted lane and paced off twenty-six yards. It wasn't as far as he thought, but still, it was far enough.

That night Dr. Alan Mainford had an interesting experience. There arrived with dinner a letter from an irate but apologetic baronet broker. He was irate for a very excellent reason, apologetic because, as he wrote:

"I'm afraid I was a little rude to you when you wrote warning me about Carton. He seemed such an excellent servant, and I thought you were a little bit uncharitable, the more so since I hadn't written to you for a reference. My agent tells me that it was he who wrote. Carton let out your name by accident as having employed him, and seemed so anxious to impress him that you had gone abroad. The man is a dreadful blackguard. . . ."

"Is that letter very amusing?"

Jane had snatched a few hours to dine with him.

"Well, it is in a way," he said. "I had a servant when I was in the army, a terrible rascal, and in a fit of mental aberration he gave my name as a reference to this man's agent—after I had warned him not to do so." He tapped the letter. "I wrote and told the innocent employer all about him and got kicked for my pains. I hadn't heard about the beggar since then, but I'll bet he doesn't give my name as reference in his next place!"

"In ordinary circumstances you wouldn't hear of him again," she said, "but you'll probably see him in a day or two. Those things always happen."

She was a true prophet. Alan was called out immediately after dinner to attend a patient who had had a relapse. He could do very little, and when that little was done he walked home—he had sent the victoria away under the impression that his stay would be a long one.

The streets were thronged with people, in spite of the fact that the night was raw and distinctly unpleasant. Most of the shops were open, and although it wanted six weeks to Christmas, the shopping season had begun.

He stepped aside to allow three long-skirted girls with linked arms to sweep along the narrow pavement, and as he recovered the sidewalk he came face to face with the one man in the world he did not expect to see. Carton's jaw dropped.

"Why, why, Captain——" he said.

"You infernal villain!" said Alan good-humouredly. "What are you doing in this town?"

"I left me last job, sir," said Carton glibly. "Couldn't get on with the people. Her ladyship used to drink, sir——"

"First you rob them, then you libel them. Are you working here?"

"Yes, sir; I've got a good job to go to. I hope, sir, you'll let bygones be bygones. Some day I'll pay you back for that watch. It's a funny thing, sir, I passed your house about ten minutes ago, saw the brass plate on the railings and wondered if I'd call. I've always said, sir, you were one of the kindest men I've ever had to deal with——"

Alan motioned him past with a jerk of his head. The meeting tickled him, a point for Jane Garden the seer.

When Alan reached home he found a letter waiting for him. It was written in a clerkly hand which he did not recognise, and was couched a little more pompously than most letters are. It was addressed from Banner Cross Terrace, Eccleshall Road, and ran:

"SIR,—You may recall the circumstance of meeting me when I called at your establishment with a bone in my throat, which you, sir, with the skill peculiar to the English medical man, removed both expeditiously and painlessly.

"I am living now at the above address, and I should be happy if you would at the first moment available to your good self make it your business to call upon me with reference to a distressing disorder of the mind. Business and domestic troubles have tended to disturb my mental equilibrium, and I think it would be wise of me if I took time by the forelock and anticipated

a serious breakdown rather than enlisted your skill to remedy its consequences.

" Your obedient servant,
" ARTHUR DYSON."

Arthur Dyson ? The name was familiar, but Alan could not place him for the moment. And then he remembered the tall man and the fish bone. He read the letter again ; it was perfectly punctuated, pedantic and self-important. He looked at his watch ; it was seven o'clock. He had dined early ; in fact, his dinner always had something of the character of a high tea when Jane slipped away from her duties to take the meal with him. Invariably she had to return early in the evening to attend her patient. He sent a message to Dixon, who complained bitterly to the stable boy, his assistant, that this man had no hours, no systems, none of the comfortable values of the old doctor.

To Dixon Dr. Mainford was always " the new man," though he had been in practice for two or three years. Not that Dixon disliked him : he had complained as persistently of the peculiar habits of the old doctor, and had compared them unfavourably in turn with an earlier employer.

He climbed into his heavy coat, jammed his top-hat down on his head, and brought the victoria round to the door.

There was no reason in the world why Alan should go out that night, for Dyson was not an important patient, not even a patient at all. But, remembering him, he was interested in the long man ; the type rather fascinated Alan Mainford.

Two patients unexpectedly arrived, and it was

half-past seven before he stepped into the victoria with a pleasant sense of anticipation, and never dreaming that he was driving straight to the heart of squalid tragedy.

CHAPTER XXV

A GREENGROCER'S cart brought Peace the greater part of his journey. He was a great beggar of lifts, always giving his great age as his excuse. Though he was but forty-four, he could pass for sixty-seven, and had successfully imposed upon prison officers in this way.

The assumption of age gave him great advantages. People were sorry for him; tradesmen would place their carts at his disposal; in prison he was given the lighter tasks, though he was stronger than any of the ruffians that occupied the wards. He could always obtain admission to the prison hospital. The pity he excited was one of his strongest assets.

He arrived at Banner Cross before his companion and loafed around in the hope of finding somebody he knew. The rain had cleared and it was a moonlit night, which did not particularly please him. He peeped into the Banner Cross Hotel, a public house that stood on the corner of the block where the Dysons' house was situated, but saw no familiar face.

He was hoping for two things: first, that he would see Mrs. Dyson and enlist her help; secondly, that he would find somebody who knew him to whom he could supply a motive for his visit.

He had been there half an hour when he saw, on

the opposite side of the road, the hesitant figure of Carton, and crossed to speak to him. He pointed at some gardens behind a low wall.

"*You stay there. If you see me coming out of that house and walk away quietly, you go back to the cottage. But if I run, I'll come over this wall*; you can either pretend you're one of the public chasing me, or you can walk down the road, get into a 'bus and go back to Sheffield. If you lose the bottle I give you—I'll follow you wherever you go and cut your throat—d'ye hear me?"

The man's teeth were chattering again.

"It doesn't look like a place for a burglary," he said.

"Never mind what it looks like," said Peace roughly. "You understand what I've told you?"

"There's a man over there . . . under the lamp-post," shivered Carton.

"I'll look after him. When I've got his back turned to you, nip over."

He crossed to where the man was standing beneath the lamp. He was a stranger to Peace, but evidently belonged to the neighbourhood.

"Looking for anybody, mate?" he asked.

"Yes," said Peace, "I'm looking for some friends of mine. They've moved in to a house about here. Know any strange people who've come here lately?"

The man didn't.

"A lady—a great friend of mine."

Peace took some letters and photographs from his pocket and handed them to the man. It was crudely done, but the purpose was defeated, for the stranger could not read. Peace looked over his shoulder:

Carton had taken advantage of the stranger's attention being held and disappeared.

"That's what I've come here for—to find her," he said; "he shan't have her—I'll shoot her first."

He found little difficulty in working up his enthusiasm for Mrs. Dyson, and the semblance of a man broken by jealousy.

But the man, apparently, had no interest in love affairs, and with a muttered excuse turned and walked away.

There was no sign of Mrs. Dyson. Peace drew nearer to the house. He looked for a light upstairs; there was none. By the side of the house ran a passage, on the left-hand side of which were some outhouses. Softly he passed through the alleyway to the back of the premises, and saw a light in one of the upstairs rooms. A figure was moving. He recognised Mrs. Dyson, and his heart thumped.

There was one signal he always gave—he gave it now. Twice he whistled softly. The second time she heard it, for he saw her turn with a start towards the window and peer out into the darkness. She might have seen him in the moonlight. The light went out. She was coming downstairs.

He would have to wait for hours, till they were all asleep, unless——

He heard the sound of her clogged feet on the pathway, and then out of the darkness she came, and he sensed her antagonism before she spoke.

"What do you want?" she asked shrilly. "There's a warrant out for you—you know that. How dare you come here!"

"Drop your voice, will tha?" he growled. "I

want you to get him to withdraw that warrant. I want to be friends with you both."

"Friends with you!" she cried contemptuously. "My husband's a gentleman; he wouldn't dream of knowing scum like you. You know what he wrote to you—he means it."

Peace always carried the little card that had been flung so contemptuously over the garden wall when he was at Darnall. He carried it now.

"Charles Peace is requested not to interfere with my family."

"Listen, Kate——"

"Don't call me Kate. I'm Mrs. Dyson."

"Listen—and keep your mouth shut, or I'll strangle you!"

She shrank back with a little scream as he advanced towards her.

"Help me, and I'll make a lady of you; give you everything you want. I've got thousands of pounds coming to me. Get your husband to withdraw the warrant: that's why I've come here. I've come here for no other reason. If anybody sees you here, that's what I've come for. I don't want to show you up, but I will, me lady. I've got letters from you that'd look fine if they was read in court."

She heard the back door open, and raised her voice for the benefit of her invisible audience.

"I don't want to see you, I don't want to know you. You're not fit for my husband to wipe his boots on. You're a low, common——"

His hand went out and gripped her. It was a fatal mistake, for she screamed.

" Who's that ? "

A voice came from the darkness. Dyson ! Peace flung her off and turned to fly, but the long-legged man caught him and gripped him by the collar. He had the advantage of height. Peace struck blindly at him, and the two men went rolling together on the ground ; fighting like a fury to throw off the weight of the man, Peace reached for his revolver.

" Stand back ! "

He had wriggled free, but his assailant came on.

The crack of the first explosion sounded thunderously. The man stumbled and fell. Peace fired again and fled.

He had one thought—the bottle. He doubled back to the house, along the passage and through the door ; in a few seconds he was in the bedroom. Pulling open the drawers, he saw the liniment bottle in the second, fumbled with its base, then, with a croak of joy, slipped out the phial it contained and dropped it into his pocket.

He came out into the street, saw men running, and, flying across the road, leapt the wall. Carton was waiting for him.

" What was that I heard—a shot ? You didn't shoot anybody ? " he whispered. " Oh, my God ! You didn't kill anybody ? "

" Take this ! "

Peace thrust the bottle into the man's pocket.

" Get back over the wall—nobody will see you. Go straight to the cottage and wait for me. Remember what I told you, Carton."

In another instant he had disappeared into the darkness.

Carton ran in the shadow of the wall through the garden before he came through a gateway into the

road. It was well for him that he did this, for the flight of the murderer had been observed. A police whistle was blowing. What had happened?

Carton crossed to the public house and drank a stiff brandy. Men came in and out with the news. A man had been killed—shot dead.

"I've seen him myself. He's laying up there in a back yard . . . go and have a look."

Fortified by the brandy, Carton followed the advice.

Killed—murdered! The horror of it appalled him; the danger turned his blood to water. He made his way through dark passages, guided by the stream of men and women who had been attracted by the shooting, and found himself in a back yard. There it was—a lank, sprawling figure. From the house came the screams of an hysterical woman. Somebody said "Peace—Charlie Peace." Mrs. Dyson had screamed his name.

A policeman was already there, making elaborate notes which he was never afterwards to decipher. The book in his hand was shaking, and there on the ground was Arthur Dyson, ludicrously dead.

A surgeon came and made an examination. The policeman, recovering from his dumb inertia, ordered the crowd to disperse, but there was no authority in his voice, and Carton lingered on, held to the spot by a gallows complex.

Then he heard a voice and turned with a start. It was Alan Mainford; he was talking to the surgeon, and frowning down at the limp figure stretched on the earth, a dark pool near his head, his face mercifully hidden from Carton. He heard Alan ask: "When did it happen?" and a dozen voices volunteered.

The surgeon looked up sharply.

"Can't you get all these people away?" he asked the policeman, and only then were the morbid onlookers dispersed.

Outside Carton saw a victoria standing by the side of the road, and guessed it was Alan's. He waited, too. The instructions of Peace were forgotten, or, if remembered, voided by the horror he had seen with his own eyes. Go back to the cottage. . . . ? To be killed perhaps . . . savage little beast. No, Carton could not face that. To stay in a lone house with him, miles from everywhere, at his mercy, or face inquiring detectives and pretend to be at his ease. Stealing spoons and forks, indulging in more pleasant villainies, a forged character or two—that was nothing. This was murder. He had seen the dead man and the blood, and heard his wife's maniacal laughter.

He put his hand in his pocket, touched the bottle and drew out his hand quickly. People who passed him were talking about Charles Peace. They all knew him; every man had seen him. They were eager to discover or invent an acquaintance with this celebrity.

"A little fellow about so high," said one man. "He used to work with me in the Millsands Mill . . . that's where he hurt his leg . . . a lame little fellow, but you'd hardly notice it."

What a celebrity the man was! Carton could have said something, if he could have spoken a word. But his mouth was dry. He went back into the Banner Cross Hotel and had another drink, swallowing it down quickly for fear Alan went away without his seeing him. What he could say to him he did not know, but Alan was a gentleman and an officer, and Carton had served seven years in the army and had acquired the habit of faith in military authority. Officers were still

godlike to him, and Alan had been an officer—only a medical officer, it is true, but still an officer, whom one had to salute and before whom one stood to attention.

What was he to say to him? He did not know. He would just wait till he came out and then say—something.

Three police officers arrived in a trap, the horse in a muck sweat. The policeman who drove him got down and covered him with a rug. Carton watched, fascinated. The men who came by that cart would think nothing of taking him, putting handcuffs on his hands and driving him off to the police station, discussing their private affairs, and, leaving him in a cell, go home to their wives as though nothing had happened. It was just their ordinary business. And the screws would come in one morning, followed by a bearded man, who would shake hands with him, and say: "I'm very sorry I've got to do this, and I hope you don't bear any ill will." Marwood always said the same thing to all condemned prisoners, and if they asked him whether the rope would hurt he used to say: "I'll make it easy for you."

Suppose he didn't make it easy for them? There was no opportunity for reproaching him.

Carton's mouth was dry again. He had to hold his chin to keep his teeth from dancing against one another.

Then he saw Alan come out, and impulsively went towards him.

"Oh, sir!" he said.

Alan looked round and stared at the man.

"You again?" he said. "What the devil are you doing here?"

Carton tried to speak.

"I've got some relations here," he managed to stammer at last. "Ain't it awful, sir?"

"Did you hear anything—the shots fired?"

"No, sir; I was along the road," lied Carton. "I've got to get back to Sheffield now . . . to the station."

"Don't let me detain you," said Alan. And then: "Have you got your fare back? There'll be a 'bus along in a minute."

The man shook his head.

"Get up with Dixon—I'll drop you."

He slipped and scrambled up to the seat beside the driver. Dixon, perched in the middle, moved his box a little to the right, eyed the shivering man with no particular liking, and did not offer him a share of the apron.

All the way back to Sheffield the man was living with murder and the scaffold and bearded Marwood. Every minute Marwood was shaking hands with him, and saying how sorry he was, and hoping he would forgive him his unpleasant duty.

Near the station the victoria drew up, and the man, weak-kneed, got to the ground somehow and made his desperate appeal.

"I want to get to London, sir. I've got no money. I've no right to ask you, but, as God's my judge, I'm going to go straight. I know just where this life is taking me."

He was sincere. Alan realised that the sight of the murdered man had affected him terribly. He took a golden coin out of his pocket.

"Good-bye, sovereign," he said flippantly. "You know my address, if you're honest."

The man took the pound and quavered his thanks.

Then a thought struck him. He took the bottle out of his pocket.

"I found this, sir . . . in the road. I think somebody dropped it."

Alan took the phial and examined the contents casually.

"It doesn't look particularly valuable. I should throw it away."

"No, sir, I'd keep it. I'm sure it's valuable." Carton was strangely agitated. "Perhaps somebody will miss the bottle and advertise . . . I found it on the road—in the gutter."

He took off his hat and ran in the direction of the station. Alan Mainford did not see him again for a long time.

When he got home he put the phial at the back of a shelf in his poison cupboard and forgot it.

CHAPTER XXVI

PEACE reached the cottage in the early hours of the morning. The clouds which had gathered at midnight had cleared again, and it was as bright as day. Twice he had to hide behind a hedge to avoid detection by a mounted police patrol. Two o'clock was striking—he heard a church clock which must have been miles away in the still morning air—when he unlocked the door of the cottage and went in.

The place was a pit of gloom; there was neither light nor sound in the house. Peace growled under his breath. Carton had not come back. He had probably passed him on the way. A man like that would be

frightened of his own shadow and would hide at the sound of every footfall. He wouldn't dare play false. Peace had considerable faith in his own frightening qualities.

He lay down on his bed in the dark, waiting for his companion's return. He wondered if he had hurt Dyson. He wouldn't have shot him at all if the man had left him alone, if that woman hadn't screamed. He was finished with Mrs. Dyson. She was a bad woman, unworthy of him. He had been wasting his time with her.

He was half dozing when he heard a sound which brought him to his feet—a key being stealthily inserted in the front door. He went swiftly into the passage, revolver in hand. He saw a figure silhouetted against the moonlight, and it was not Carton.

"What do you want? Stand or I'll fire!"

"All right, all right!"

It was Baumgarten's voice.

"Put up your pistol, my friend. You've done enough shooting to-night."

"Have you heard?" asked Peace eagerly.

"All Sheffield has heard," said Baumgarten dryly. "Why did you kill him?"

Peace gaped at him in the darkness.

"Kill him? Is he dead?"

"Yes. Come somewhere where we can put on a light."

"You can put it on anywhere in the house," said Peace, struck a match on his trousers, and, lifting off a glass chimney, lit a paraffin lamp.

Baumgarten looked old and tired. He was wearing riding breeches and gaiters, and carried a whip in his hand.

"Is your horse outside?" asked Peace, in alarm.

"Don't be a fool—no, I've tied him up in the orchard at the back. Why did you kill him?"

"I had to," said Peace doggedly. "I didn't want to, but he grabbed at me and I had to shoot."

Baumgarten fingered his chin thoughtfully.

"You've got the crystals?" And, when Peace nodded, his eyes lit up. "Are you sure?" he asked eagerly. "Let me see them."

"I haven't got 'em with me. A friend is bringing them on—the man who was working with me. I didn't want to have them in my pocket and be caught with them."

Baumgarten stood, slapping his gaitered leg gently with the whip, his lower lip protruding, his brows knit.

"Can you trust this man? Why didn't you bring them here yourself?"

For the first time doubt came to Peace. Had he made a mistake?

"He wouldn't dare play with me. He's a frightened rat and——"

"If he's a frightened rat he will not come back here. Murder is a serious thing, my friend."

"So's other things!" growled Peace. "So's keeping a foreigner locked up in a cell and beating him to death! Don't you go telling me what's serious—or I'll tell you something!"

Baumgarten winced at that; his nerves were getting a little frayed. Just now he was looking longingly at an avenue which led to his pleasant villa at Interlaken.

"Yes, I suppose so. I will wait for the man to come."

"Have you brought the money?"

"No," said Baumgarten, and Peace knew that he lied.

But the little man was fair: he was not entitled to the money till the goods were delivered. They waited an hour—two hours. By this time Peace was patently uneasy.

"I'll go now," said Baumgarten, getting up and stretching himself.

He had paid two visits to the orchard to see that his horse had not shaken off the rug he had thrown over it.

"I'd better get home before daylight. You stay here; keep all the doors locked; a policeman sometimes comes in to try them—and the windows. It doesn't matter about the shutters being closed."

He rode off soon after. Peace heard the clip-clop of the horse's hooves for a long time.

He was in no mood for sleep. He must know what had happened to Carton. Would the man have betrayed his hiding-place? If he had, the police would have been here by now. All through the day he waited, not daring to show himself abroad.

They would be scouring the countryside for him, and his description would be circulated. That would not be the first time he had been wanted urgently, but never for so important an offence.

Only one man came near the house. He saw two mounted policeman riding abreast, coming along the road. They stopped before the cottage and one dismounted, opened the gate and came in. Peace heard him trying the door and the windows. Apparently he went all round the house before he came back and, joining his companion, mounted and rode off.

The little man had a big carpet bag in which he

kept his belongings, and when he had learned that he had to make this his headquarters he had asked Baumgarten to arrange for it to be brought to the cottage. He found it in the attic, and, opening it, made a selection.

It was no exaggeration to say that Peace was a master of disguise, in spite of the unpromising basis upon which he had to work, for it seemed impossible that a face so marked, so out of the ordinary, could be changed. Again he had recourse to his walnut disguise; he stained his face and hands a deep, sunburnt brown, and brushed carefully into his hair some of the contents of a little bottle containing a dark solution. Shaving himself carefully, he put on a beard almost hair by hair, and with such meticulous care that the operation took him more than two hours. A pair of blue trousers, a blue jersey, bearing in red letters the name of a steam packet, almost completed his disguise.

One artistic etcetera remained. Removing his left shoe, he drew on a second and third sock, and over these he wound a calico bandage. When this was done, he produced from the bag a crutch. It was made in three pieces and screwed together.

This time he would not take the iron hook. People in Sheffield knew that too well. The coldness of the weather excused the woollen gloves. The crutch and the bandaged foot hid his one detectable affliction—his lame leg.

In the dusk he stepped out of the house, his crutch under his arm. Whilst nobody was in sight he could walk, and for this purpose he had provided himself with a carpet slipper, ordinarily three sizes too large for him. This he took off and concealed in his pocket whenever a cart or a pedestrian came into sight.

He reached a cross roads and waited for a likely

"MURDER

"One Hundred Pounds Reward.

"WHEREAS on the 29th of November Mr. Arthur Dyson, C.E., was murdered at Banner Cross, Sheffield, having been shot in the head in the presence of his wife by Charles Peace, who escaped in the darkness of the night, and is still at large, NOTICE is hereby given that a reward of One Hundred Pounds will be paid by Her Majesty's Government to any person other than a person employed in a police office in the United Kingdom who shall give such information and evidence as will lead to the discovery and conviction of the said Charles Peace."

He read it, fascinated. Later, when the bill was amplified as the result of the coroner's verdict, it was so familiar to him that he did not even stop to read it.

His disguise was perfect, but he took no risks, not venturing into any of the public-houses where he expected to find Carton, but contenting himself with a furtive peep into the bar. He went the complete round

without finding any indication of the man, and was giving up the search when it occurred to him that he might inquire at the lodgings which Carton had taken on his arrival.

He went to the house and had a shock : the landlord did not recognise him.

" Your brother, is he ? Well, all I can tell you is that he's a swindler. Tried to get away without paying his rent, he did ! My son's a porter on the station, and he see him get into the London train, and says he to himself : ' I wonder if he's paid the old man his rent ? ' and with that he goes up to him."

" When was this ? " quavered Peace, in the deep voice he had adopted.

" Night before last. Anyway, my son got five shillings out of him."

" Gone to London, has he ? " The heart of the little man sank like lead.

" It's my belief," said the landlord, " that he was in with this fellow Charles Peace. I wouldn't be a bit surprised."

" Who is Charles Peace ? " asked the bearded little stranger.

" A murderer," said the other emphatically ; " and they'll catch him—you mark my words ! And Carton too."

Peace ambled down the street, his mind a violent, bubbling sea of hate. Carton had gone away, had he ? And taken the bottle. But perhaps he was only scared. He was a frightened cur of a man who would fly in terror, though there was no danger to him. That was the only hope.

In the street he heard his name spoken at every few yards. The town was being scoured ; every lodging-

house had been raided. Near Fargate he saw Baldy Eltham, looking surprisingly smart in uniform.

To reach home he had to take a cab for part of the way, and there was a long and dreary wait till a carrier's cart came in sight and dropped him at the cross-roads near his new home. The carrier was actually passing the cottage, but Peace asked to be dropped, indicating that he lived in another direction.

There was one relief for him : Carton had not told the police. Peace had an old time-table in his bag, and this he studied. The man must have driven straight from Banner Cross and caught the last train to London. He wouldn't have had time to tell all he knew. That was it ! He was frightened ; he hadn't Peace's nerve. On this comforting thought the little man fell asleep, without even attempting to remove his disguise.

He improved upon and perfected it the next day. When Baumgarten called towards evening, it completely deceived him. The visitor looked at the little man with a new respect, but he was very grave. Madame had taken a very serious view of the murder, and would not in any case be associated with Peace. He brought fifty pounds in gold. If the crystals arrived, the reward would come in addition.

" There's no sense in me keeping meself locked up here," said Peace. " Nobody would know me. All I want is a little pony cart and a pony. I asked you for that the other day, and you said ' Yes,' but where is it ? There's a stable out at the back, and it would save you coming here, too."

It struck Baumgarten as an excellent idea. He promised to bring the matter up again. Without consulting Madame Stahm, he bought a pony, cart and harness and left it outside the cottage that same night.

Peace was almost jubilant. His instructions had been carried out ; the cart was loaded with fodder, and he led the pony down the lane by the side of the cottage into the stable he had prepared for him.

Thereafter, farmers and labourers in the neighbourhood became familiar with the sight of the bearded, seafaring man, who drove his pony and cart, When the bearded, seafaring man disappeared, and his place was taken by a groom who wore steel spectacles and a cavalry moustache, they hardly remarked upon it.

The low pony cart served his purpose admirably. It made it impossible to detect his height, and the smartly-fitting livery coat he wore changed his entire appearance.

To the world Charles Peace had disappeared as though the ground had opened and swallowed him. Even more effectively had Carton vanished ; no news came from him ; he did not reappear in Sheffield. Generally it was believed that he had gone abroad. One theory was that he had left for Hull the same night.

CHAPTER XXVII

ORDINARILY Peace did not read the daily newspapers : he reserved his reading for Sundays, and devoured every line that dealt with crime. The police court proceedings, fashionable trials, divorce news—he read them and re-read them, gloating over every detail. But now he was an assiduous subscriber to the *Telegraph*. Every item of news concerning the Banner Cross murder he examined and memorised.

A great many of the stories set down were purely

apocryphal. He called them lies, and added various adjectives. There was not a word about the crystals: that was a relief, not only to him, but to the troubled people at Brinley Hall. Madame Stahm had her boxes packed ready for flight. Baumgarten had already transferred the greater part of his account to a Swiss bank. As the days progressed and no police inquiries came their way they decided to remain.

The inquest was reported in full, and again there was no mention of the missing phial. Mrs. Dyson knew nothing of it. Peace never expected she would, but thought that the man might have had a confidant. He had, but there were excellent reasons why Wertheimer should not mention his negotiations. He could not have raised the money; he had no desire that the world should know that such a valuable secret existed. He himself attended Dyson's funeral, and later that night called on the sorrowing widow. It was easy to discover that she knew very little about her husband's business. She was, in fact, very voluble, since the occasion called for stimulants.

"Do you remember, madam," said Wertheimer, in the first moment they were alone, "what your poor, dear husband did with the little phial of crystals I left with him? I called one evening, you remember, to discuss certain matters with him—possibly you were out; I think you were—and I left him a sample of a new oxide."

She shook her head.

"Don't bother me, mister," she said wearily. "I haven't seen anything. What do they look like?"

He described them.

"Go up to his room and look," she said, and he went up with a bounding heart.

He searched drawers, cupboards and boxes, but found nothing. There was in one of the drawers a curious bottle of liniment, the bottom of which was apparently hollow, but he saw in this no more than an honest attempt by a manufacturer to cheat the purchaser in the matter of quantity.

He was so long and so thorough in his search that she came up to him and demanded irritably whether he expected to stay there for ever.

He followed this up by a visit to Dyson's office. There was a locker there, where he had kept a few personal belongings. His desk had been cleared and the contents put aside; these were available for inspection, and though Wertheimer had no authority his right to examine was not questioned.

He was puzzled and alarmed. Dyson at the last moment might have changed his mind about disposing of the crystals to Madame Stahm. He decided upon taking a bold step; he wrote to that worthy lady, humbly, flatteringly, begging the privilege of an interview. To his surprise and gratification it was granted.

He drove himself out to Brinley Hall one afternoon, prepared for all eventualities. In each pocket he had a loaded derringer. Madame received him graciously, however, cut short all the polite preamble and came down to business. She demanded perfect frankness about his negotiations with Dyson (he was staggered here, for he had never dreamed she knew), and when he gave his confidence he learned in return that the worst had not happened. Dyson had neither offered the crystals nor had she bought them.

They parted excellent friends and potential partners. His treason was forgotten and forgiven. He also had one or two things to forgive, and made no inquiry as

to the fate of the lamented Lamonte. It was unfortunate that such things should happen, but such was life.

On his way back he passed a little pony cart driven by a very stiff-looking groom who wore spectacles. He had never before seen a groom wearing spectacles, which practice was essentially the prerogative of the indoor or learned classes.

Another week passed. Peace read the account of the inquest both in the daily and the weekly newspapers. He learned that he had been seen in London and at Portsmouth, and that a man answering to his description had been arrested in Newcastle.

"Every limping man is a suspect," said the newspaper.

Charles Peace was grateful for the hint.

The pony cart enabled him to travel far afield. He went to Mansfield one day, put his horse up at a livery stable and journeyed on to London. He had to find another bolt-hole. Besides which, his family were in trouble with the eating-house at Hull, and he must bring them to a new nest.

He spent three days in London, a bearded seaman with a bandaged foot, and finally decided to take a house in Peckham. It was a two-storeyed villa in a poor neighbourhood, but it was distinctly better than any house he had ever occupied. It had bow windows, and there was a certain touch of respectability in the steps which led to the front door, and in the area and basement. He paid a month's rent down. The house, he said, was for his nephew and his sister-in-law, who were arriving from Wales.

By the time he had finished negotiations, his wife and family had left Hull secretly and apparently

unnoticed. Police methods in 1876 were loose and inadequate. Nobody seemed to bother about Mrs. Peace and her plans, though it was certain that sooner or later a careful watch on her would bring the observers to the much-wanted Charles.

Peace had plenty of money. In the course of a brief meeting with his wife in London he gave her sufficient to furnish the house, and insisted that one article of furniture should be a piano.

Returning to Mansfield, he retrieved his pony and trap and drove back to the cottage. That was the first of many excursions. The image of Mrs. Dyson had eclipsed an earlier love. With the disappearance of the faithless Kate, the tender memories of an older attachment came back to the little man, and he sought out the lady, whose name was Thompson.

The excitement over the murder had died down. He was getting tired of his country life, and had made up his mind to drive by easy stages to London, when a letter came to him. He found it thrust under the front door when he returned from a visit to Sheffield. It bore the London postmark and was addressed to "Mr. Gray," the name by which he had decided to be known when he took possession of the cottage.

He turned it over and over in his hand. It was not in his wife's writing or in his daughter's, and yet the postmark was "London, S.E." He tore open the flap and took out a single sheet of paper. There was no address on the top, and it began abruptly:

"I haven't told a soul, but I can't stand things like that. I'm doing well now and am going straight. I gave the bottle to Dr. Mainford. He lives in Sheffield.

He was in the army with me. I said I'd found it in the road."

That was all—but it was enough to make the little man grow in stature. The deep, dog eyes sparkled with life. Alan Mainford—that puppy! There was going to be a lark here. He grew almost young at the thought of adventure. Charles Peace, wanted for murder in Sheffield, would go into Sheffield and do another job right under the nose of the police. Nobody else would dare do it, only Charlie Peace. Or perhaps he wouldn't have to " do " the house at all. Suppose he tried one of his little tricks—the sort of trick that only Charles Peace could think of and have the nerve to carry out.

He cogitated on the matter, strolling up and down beneath the bare, wind-blown branches of the little orchard at the back of the cottage, stroking the beard that wasn't his.

Alan Mainford returned from his early visits one morning and learned from his housekeeper that an elderly gentleman had called on a strange errand.

" He said he had lost a phial of valuable chemicals, sir, on the night of the murder at Banner Cross, and that he'd heard you'd found them. Of course I knew nothing about it."

Alan had forgotten all about the phial.

" Good Lord, yes! I remember."

He went to his poison cupboard and fished out the little bottle.

" What sort of a man was he? "

" He looked like a sailor, sir. He had a very bad foot; it was all bandaged up and in a sling. What he said was that the chemicals were the only things that

were good for his foot. He said that if you could find them and leave them for him, he'd call to-morrow or send his groom."

"A sailor with a groom sounds a little curious to me. I'd like to see the gentleman. If he calls again you can tell him I have the crystals, and I shall be happy to hand them to him if he will prove his ownership."

A groom with steel spectacles and a cavalry moustache called and received the message without betraying his natural annoyance.

"The gentleman's very ill with a bad foot," he said, with an indignation which was not simulated. "I'm surprised at the doctor keeping my governor's property."

"That's what he says: if the gentleman will call he will hand the bottle over to him."

"He's got it, has he?"

She nodded.

"Yes, I saw it myself," said the garrulous woman. "It's kept in the poison cupboard. So, if your gentleman will call——"

"He'll call, ma'am," said Peace grimly, and drove home with a light heart.

CHAPTER XXVIII

He didn't want any more shooting. He certainly did not wish to meet Alan Mainford with no other defence than his fists. But doctors are called out late at nights, and the house would be patently empty and easy.

Yet it was not an easy place to burgle. It stood on a main thoroughfare, with a police station not a hundred yards away. There was traffic of sorts day and night, and at the back of the house a stable building which was apparently doubly occupied. Peace did not know then that Miss Garden had her lodgings there, but he knew that the groom slept over his stables and that a stable boy slept in a loft.

In the middle of the paved yard was an ornamental lamp-post, an eccentricity of the old doctor, and, more eccentrically still, remembering it was a private lamp-post, its gas burner was lit every night and extinguished every morning.

The house was detached; there was no way of gaining access except from the front or the rear. The only windows at the side were out of reach, and a ladder would be instantly detected by the passers by.

Leaving his horse and trap in a neighbouring stable, he watched Alan go out hurriedly one night, carrying a small black bag, and hardly waited until he was out of sight before he attacked the front window. Luck was with him, for there was no pedestrian within a hundred yards. He was inside and had closed the window down within a few seconds.

He found himself in the waiting-room. He had taken a very careful note of the topography, and, crossing the passage noiselessly, reached the small dispensary, a narrow apartment which had been formed by putting up a party wall that cut off a portion of the surgery and consulting room. He had hardly closed the door behind him when there came a knock at the front door, which was repeated. To his alarm, he heard the housekeeper go along the passage and turn the key. He had counted upon her being asleep.

"Is the doctor in?" asked a well-known voice.

Baldy Eltham!

Peace looked round for a way of escape. The room was at the side of the house. There were no windows, the light being supplied by two powerful gas burners. Nor was there any key or bolt on the inside of the door. His only escape was along the passage and either out of the front door or by the way he had come.

"I'll wait," said Baldy's voice. "My other tooth is aching like the devil. I want the doctor to give me some of that stuff he put in the other night. I could go right in and find it—I know exactly where it is—in the poison cupboard."

The hair on the back of the little man's neck stood up. He drew his revolver from his pocket and clicked round the cylinder.

"The poison cupboard's locked, Mr. Eltham," said the housekeeper's voice. "You'll have to wait till the doctor returns. He won't be very long—the baby was born before they sent for him."

The heavy foot of Eltham sounded in the passage. He gripped the handle of the dispensary door, turned it and opened the door a few inches. Peace crouched

down near the floor, rested his pistol hand on his knee. He had extra cartridges in his pocket, but he would have no time to reload. He held six in his left hand in case. . . . One slipped and fell to the floor. It made a clatter which the man outside must hear.

"Well, perhaps I'd better wait."

The door slammed and his voice retreated—but not far enough. He had gone into the snuggery, which was no more than a big recess behind the stairs. Peace pulled his lantern from under his coat, turned the slide and examined the room quickly.

That must be the poison cupboard—the white one. He tried it! It was locked. And here he had another shock: the cupboard was made of steel, and the lock was really a lock. To force it open would not be a very difficult task, but it would be a noisy job, and a little too risky.

He was considering what to do when he heard a key in the street door lock, a light step in the passage, and Alan's voice.

"A false alarm. The other doctor was there before me. Hallo, Baldy! What's the matter with you?"

"Toothache, doctor."

"We'll settle that," said Alan's voice.

It was now or never. Pulling the door open quickly, Peace stepped into the passage. The doctor had not come into sight. Noiselessly he opened the front door and slipped out, leaving it ajar.

"What the deuce is that?" said Alan.

He had caught one glimpse of the vanishing figure.

"What's wrong?" asked Baldy.

Alan ran to the door, pulled it open and stepped into the street. There was no sign of the intruder.

"Somebody was in the house. Have you been into the dispensary?" He saw the open door.

"I haven't been in, but I opened and shut the door."

"Are you sure you left it shut?"

"I'll swear to it with a prayer-book in each hand," said Baldy.

Alan went in and lit the gas. Nothing had been moved or disturbed. With a final glance round he was turning out the gas, when a bright object on the floor caught his eye. Stooping, he picked it up.

"Here's a pin-fire cartridge."

Baldy almost snatched it from his hand and examined it carefully.

"Pin-fire?" he said slowly. "A revolver cartridge, of the same calibre as the bullet that killed Arthur Dyson. You know the name of the man who was in here, don't you? If you don't, I'll tell you—it was Charles Peace."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE police kept their secret well. None of the general public knew that the presence of Peace in Sheffield was as much as suspected. The search that was made of the town was thorough; it was also futile. Before dawn every questionable resort, every common lodging-house, every one of his old haunts had been combed and sifted.

Baldy came to breakfast, weary-eyed, baffled. Every railway station for twenty miles in every direction was being picketed and watched.

"The nerve of the fellow, to come back here! And

to think I nearly went into that dispensary! He couldn't have got out."

"And you mightn't have got out either, except on a stretcher," said Alan. "On the whole I'm glad you changed your mind about going in."

"Why did he come here?" asked the sergeant. "There's nothing to steal."

"Don't be rude, Baldy. Why shouldn't my house be burgled? It's simply full of valuable property. Seriously, I've got over a thousand pounds' worth of old silver in the house, and it must have seemed easy to him. My theory is that he watched until I went out last night, got in through the waiting-room window—if you look you'll see where it's been forced up—heard your knock at the door, and nipped into the dispensary."

"Why the dispensary?" asked Baldy, and Alan groaned.

"Because it was the only place he could go. The door is exactly opposite the waiting-room door. It is the last place he would have chosen. There is no way out except by the door."

"What nerve!" said Baldy, with reluctant admiration. "To come back to Sheffield——"

"Has he ever been away?" asked Alan quietly.

"He's away now," said the sergeant, "but he'll be lucky to get right away! He won't put his nose in Sheffield for many a day."

But here he was wrong.

Alan did not for one moment connect the phial of crystals with this unpleasant visitation. The caller who wanted to retrieve his property passed out of his mind. Two or three days later, Jane Garden came home for a long rest. She had been continuously working

almost since the day this strange partnership had been formed. Christmas was approaching, and she planned a visit to the south coast.

"Why not follow the example of your late employer and see some white snow and blue skies?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Madame Stahm has departed for Switzerland, lock, stock and barrel, with all her personal staff, her Mr. Baumgarten, her furniture, hangings and tapestries. In fact, the Hall is for sale."

She hardly credited the news.

"Madame will leave nothing behind in England," he went on, "but some forty thousand pounds which she has foolishly spent in her fruitless attempts to make a new kind of steel. She will also leave a bad impression and a disconsolate minstrel boy. Mr. Charles Peace never had such an appreciative audience."

The rumour was that she had formed some sort of business alliance with her arch-enemy, Wertheimer. At any rate, they had been seen together at one of the leading lawyers' offices three times in a week, and it was accepted that a working arrangement had been signed, sealed and delivered.

"And I think she's wise. She had some sort of connection with that little beast. Possibly he knows a little too much about her, and she is wise to go before he's arrested and opens his mouth."

He told her of the midnight intruder, and was frank about it.

"I'm telling you," he said, "because, if I didn't, our dear housekeeper would make a song about it. That woman ought to have been a reporter: she can keep nothing to herself."

Jane was staggered when she heard the story.

"Here? Peace? Alan, it's impossible!"

"I should have thought so, but it isn't. He'll not come here again, so you can sleep sound at nights!"

He might not believe that Peace had left Sheffield. He was dangerously confident that the little man would not repeat his foray, but here he underrated the audacity of one who boasted that he believed in God and the devil and feared neither.

Two mornings after the burglary an unexpected visitor called upon Dr. Mainford, and on seeing him Alan almost gasped.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Carton grinned.

"I came up to bring down one of our young gentlemen who goes to school near here, sir," he said. "I thought I'd call in and pay you the money I owe you."

He took a sovereign from his pocket and put it on the table.

"An unexpected windfall for me—I hope you got it fairly, Carton?"

"I'm going straight, sir. All old lags say that, but I'm telling the truth. I've got a good job, and I've told the governor all about my past. It took a bit of courage, but I did it."

"Good luck to you! And keep the sovereign as a souvenir of our unpleasant acquaintance!"

The man shook his head with a smile.

"No, thank you, sir; I've always looked forward to the day when I'd pay you back."

There was a note of anxiety in his tone when he asked:

"Has anything more been heard about Peace?"

Alan was almost inclined to tell him of his recent experience, but thought better of it.

"He hasn't been caught."

"People think he's in London," said the man in a troubled voice. "I hope he isn't. Not that I'm likely to meet him—I live on the outskirts. That was a lesson to me."

"Were you with him that night?" asked Alan quietly, and when Carton did not answer he thought it wise not to press the question.

He was saying good-bye to the man when a thought occurred to him.

"You remember that bottle of chemicals you left with me? I wish you'd take it away. I'm afraid I shall lose it, and I'd like to hand the responsibility on to you—not that there's very much responsibility attached to it."

The man shifted awkwardly, cleared his throat.

"If it's a bother, sir, I'll take it."

He had often wondered whether the doctor had thrown the phial into the dustbin. Alan unlocked the poison cupboard, took out the bottle and brought it from the dispensary.

"Here you are," he said.

Carton took it gingerly and dropped it into his pocket. The very motion brought back a too poignant memory of another occasion when some one else had given him that bottle to dispose of.

Jane came in just before the man went, and Alan told her the story of the phial, but it had no special significance for her.

When he had gone, she chatted about her patient, and, as a thought struck her:

"I saw such an odd-looking man, a groom, to-day. He was driving a pony cart. A queer-looking man with steel spectacles and a moustache."

"What did he do that was odd?"

"He looked at me," she said, and he laughed uproariously.

"That wasn't odd, it was the most perfectly natural thing to do. I look at you—I'm never tired of looking at you. Where did this terrible happening occur?"

"Outside Mrs. Elford's house. I had a feeling he was following me in the pony cart, but probably he was only waiting for somebody. It looked rather like a doctor's trap, but I've never seen the man before. It was his eyes that were so strange; it may have been my imagination, but they seemed to glare at me."

"To look at you is praiseworthy; to glare at you is unpardonable. Find me this groom and I'll poison him," said Alan. "I think I know the pony cart—I've seen it several times. Sometimes it's driven by the groom, and sometimes by a rather nice old gentleman in a square felt hat. I'll look out for him and tell him not to glare. By the way, I was wrong when I told you that Madame Stahm had gone—she did not leave until yesterday morning. Apparently she has been staying in a Sheffield hotel for a week."

CHAPTER XXX

THE first intimation received by Peace that his patroness was departing had come with the arrival of Baumgarten in the red dusk of a wintry evening. Peace listened incredulously.

"She's going away?" And then, with righteous indignation: "What about me?"

"To be exact, she has gone away," said Baumgarten. "She crossed the Channel yesterday, and I am leaving this afternoon. Madame is not well; she is very unhappy; she has lost money, and people who might have helped her have been stupid. It was stupid to trust a man you had not met till a week before; it was stupid to shoot when you might have threatened."

"What about me?" demanded Peace again.

It was easy to act the wrathful, ill-used man.

"After all I've done and the risks I took! I wouldn't have taken 'em for anybody else in the world."

Baumgarton sat down at the discoloured table—it had once been white, but Peace was an untidy eater—and laid down a heavy leather wallet, opened it and poured out a stream of shining gold.

"There is a hundred pounds there. Recover for us the crystals, and there will be two thousand in addition. Have you a good memory, my friend?"

Peace nodded.

"You know Madame's name and how it is spelt? Yes, I remember, you do. You know my name and how it is spelt? Add the two names together. Madame and I are to be married. Remember, Madame Stahm-

Baumgarten, and our address will be the National Bank, Berne. Write it down, commit it to memory, and destroy the paper."

"I never forget anything," said Peace. "I've only got to read a scene in Shakespeare twice and get the words in me head, and I never forget it."

"A letter will find madame, or, better still, a telegram. If you find the crystals, send a telegraphic message, telling me where I can meet you, and I will be with you in twenty-four hours. If you do not find them"—he shrugged—"this is the end." He waved his hand to the shining heap on the table. "And now, I will go."

"I hope you have a pleasant journey, sir," said Peace, and held out his hand, but Mr. Baumgarten apparently did not see it.

Peace gathered up the gold, counted it and adjusted it in ten little heaps, and then in five larger heaps, and then balanced the hundred coins one on top of the other, finally wrapping them in paper so that they made rouleaux of twenty each. These he secreted in various odd pockets and belts.

In a sense the departure of Madame Stahm was a relief. He intended leaving the cottage and putting it into the hands of an agent to sell. It would be worth three or four hundred pounds. He drove into Sheffield, interviewed an estate agent, who was most agreeable to carrying out his instructions.

"You can either sell it or mortgage it," he said. "If you will let me have the title deeds, I will see what is the best arrangement."

It was on the tip of the little man's tongue to say that he had no title deeds, but instinct told him that that would be a false move on his part. He searched

the house for them, thinking they were left behind, and resolved to write to Madame Stahm to supply the missing documents. She had given him the cottage—Baumgarten had said so. A gentleman's word ought to be his bond.

He would stay at the cottage a little longer, for he had not given up his quest. Though Alan was unaware of the fact, Peace haunted the house, gaining an extensive knowledge of the doctor's movements.

He found another interest—the presence of Jane Garden. He could put only one construction upon the friendship between Alan and the girl, because he knew no other variety of friendship. That whipper-snapper must be very fond of her, he mused ; and who wouldn't be ? She wasn't as fine a creature as Mrs. Dyson. He thought she was rather namby-pamby, and namby-pambyness in a woman cancelled out most of her attractions. But she was a good-looker, a high-stepper—and a lady. That factor had an irresistible appeal to Peace. He worshipped gentility.

If the truth be told, he had been none too pleased with the impish rôle which Madame Stahm had assigned to him on a certain occasion. His vanity rebelled against the suggestion that he was old enough to be the father of any woman of attractive age and appearance, and he was almost glad when the deception had been revealed.

Yet, for all her beauty, Jane Garden had something of a neutral quality in his mind. His gross day-dreams took baser shapes. Her rare and delicate beauty was beyond his appreciation, for he progressed by comparisons. Kate Dyson was prettier than Thompson ; Thompson was prettier than that girl in Hull. Between

the most ravishing beauty in his drab life and Jane Garden was an unbridgeable gulf.

But she had a rare figure and good teeth. Peace, who had few serviceable teeth, set great store by this gift of nature. She lived in a little house over the stable. At first he could not believe that any man who called himself a gentleman could allow a lady to live over a stable like a common groom; but apparently she did not feel the disgrace of it. She would have been surprised and alarmed to know how often those dog-like eyes of Charles Peace watched her running up the wooden steps to her room in the course of the next few weeks.

There was a small walled enclosure where stable refuse was thrown. Peace found this a convenient hiding-place one night, when Alan and the girl went out together. It offered no great opportunity to the little man, for the housekeeper had been nervous since the burglary, and had brought in a stalwart nephew to keep her company when she was in the place alone.

Dixon also was out. It was a boisterous night. Creeping from his hiding-place, Peace took the long pole which hung on one of the stable walls under a protecting ledge, and extinguished the lamp, replacing the pole where he had found it. He was curious to see what kind of a hovel the girl had for a home, and, passing swiftly up the steps, he tried the door, and, when that failed him, a narrow window which was within reach. He clambered into a room, pulled down the dark blinds and lit a candle end. He was surprised to discover how cosy and pleasant it was, and continued his leisurely inspection.

There was a possibility that he might find something to his advantage, but there was nothing in either of

the two rooms that it would have paid him to take away, even if it had been wise to do so.

He extinguished his candle end, pulled up the blinds and let himself out of the door. As he crossed the yard he could see through the kitchen window the faint light of the room where the housekeeper and her nephew were sitting. But the place was too small to burgle whilst anybody was awake inside.

He tried the flanking wall of the house, hoping for an inspiration. The roof was no use. This was going to be a very difficult job. He was meditating upon ways and means when he saw the victoria pulling up at the house, and hastened to his hiding-place. Usually Alan and the girl went indoors, but to-night they walked around through the gateway into the yard.

"Hallo!" he heard Alan say. "The light's blown out. One minute—I'll light it for you."

He walked across the yard, found the lighter's pole, and, after several attempts, set light to the methylated wick at the end, and, pushing up the governing tap, relit the lamp.

"There's always that profession for me if medicine fails," he said, as he hung up the pole. "Are you sure you won't have supper?"

"No, I'm going to bed—I'm tired."

Alan glanced up at the stable building.

"Dixon won't be back till late. I hate leaving you there alone. If anything happened to you, Jane, I think I'd go raving mad."

She laughed softly.

"What can happen to me except a good night's sleep?"

"I wish to heavens they'd find this man. He's getting a little on my nerves."

"You mean Peace?"

"Yes."

She laughed again.

"How silly of you! He wouldn't hurt me."

"He'd cut the throat of his own mother if it served him," said Alan.

The hidden man smirked as at a compliment.

"Good-night!"

He heard a kiss, and her light feet on the steps. It was funny that they should part with a kiss, like two people who were only just courting.

He caught a glimpse of her on the landing at the top, waving her hand, and heard the door close. That house would never be burgled, he told himself as he drove homeward. The young doctor was too wide, and it was dangerous. He'd probably have a gun or a pistol in the house—bound to have, he being an old army man. And there in that house was a fortune—that was the maddening thing about it. If he could only lay his hands on that phial! If he only had a friend there! If he could get round the housekeeper, or have a talk with the girl! He only wanted a chance of meeting her and talking her over. Women would do anything for him.

Peace had no doubt at all about his powers of fascination. His mind went back again and again to the girl and Alan. Sloppy, that's what it was. Going on like two school kids. He couldn't understand it. If "anything happened" to her, Alan had said. . . .

His lips curled, then suddenly drooped. A splendid idea dawned in his brain—a wonderful idea. It was one of the grandest ideas he had ever had. He almost shouted for joy as he whipped up the pony into a gallop, and he pottered about the house for the greater part

of the night, singing, in his not unpleasant falsetto, a song which he himself had written and composed. It was called: "If the Angels Should Take Me Away," and it was about heaven and mothers and lonely lovers.

This was to be a job after his own heart, a job that required planning and timing and rehearsing.

He snatched a few hours' sleep, and prepared the house for certain contingencies; fed and groomed his pony, and washed down the trap with water that he drew from a well at the back of the cottage. There was an air of gaiety about the equipage that drove into Sheffield. This time he did not bait the horse, but walked him slowly round and round until he stopped by the side of a dark road within view of Alan's house. He waited half an hour, saw the doctor come out and drive away. Leaving the pony unattended, he walked across the road, and, taking a letter from his pocket, slipped it into the letter-box, knocked a sharp rat-tat and hurried away.

The housekeeper, who carried the letter to Jane Garden, did not mention the fact that it had been put in the letter-box, although it had been brought by hand. Jane opened the envelope and read the ill-written scrawl.

"If you please, miss, Mrs. Elford has been taken very ill again. Can you come at once?

"Yours truly,

"MARY SMITH."

It looked like a letter that a servant might have written. Mrs. Elford had been one of her patients—the last she had attended—and she had left her a picture

of robust health. She could not suspect that the little man, who, unknown to her, had been collecting information about her for days, was well aware that she had nursed Mrs. Elford.

It was only a short journey; she decided to go on foot. Peace, watching the house, saw her come out and his heart sang within him. Turning the pony, he followed her at a distance, overtaking her just as she was turning into the gate of a house.

"Excuse me, miss!"

She heard the urgent voice and looked round.

"Is that Nurse Garden?"

"Yes," she said, wondering.

"Mrs. Elford isn't there. She's gone out into the country, on the Chesterfield Road. I was sent to bring you to her."

Jane hesitated.

"Does the doctor know?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, miss."

Beyond the fact that he had a high, squeaky voice and was a seemingly inoffensive old man with a beard, she scarcely noticed the driver, and got into the trap without further demur. Peace urged on the pony, and she noticed, as a curious fact, that he avoided the main exit from the town, and took a bumpy side road which eventually joined the main road where Sheffield proper ended and the country began.

She was a little puzzled. Mrs. Elford was a woman who told her all that she knew, and she had never made any reference to relations who lived outside of Sheffield.

"Who wrote the note?"

"The cook, miss," said the driver.

She asked him one or two questions, and when he

again turned off to a side road she thought they were near their destination. What Peace was doing was to avoid the cross-roads where police patrols sometimes met.

"You're going a long way round," she said when they were again on the Derby road.

"The pony don't like traffic, miss. He's a bit shy, so I keep him to the quiet lanes."

They drew up before the cottage, and Peace drove the pony up the side path to the back of the house. He apologised for keeping her waiting while he unharnessed the horse and put him in the stable. This done, he led her back to the front of the house, unlocked the door and flung it open. The place was in darkness.

"Are there no lights?" she asked, and for answer found herself roughly pushed into the passage.

She stumbled and nearly fell. Before she could recover herself the heavy door was closed with a crash, and a voice which struck terror to her soul, said:

"You'll have all the lights you want, my girl. Get in there and keep your mouth shut, or you'll be sorry."

CHAPTER XXXI

"MISS GARDEN has been called away," reported the housekeeper. "Mrs. Elford was taken very ill to-night and sent round for her."

Alan stopped himself in the act of hanging up his overcoat. "Mrs. Elford ill?" he said incredulously. "Did she send for me?"

"No, sir, the letter was for Miss Garden."

He looked at her blankly.

"But I saw Mrs. Elford this afternoon and she was perfectly well."

He went over the case in his mind. Though there was a possibility of a relapse, it was extremely unlikely. He put on his coat and hat again and went out. The house was no great distance from his own, and in ten minutes he was pulling the bell at his patient's residence. Mrs. Elford was in the drawing-room, said the maid, evidently surprised to see him.

"Is Nurse Garden here?" he asked.

"Nurse Garden, sir? No. The missus is quite well."

"Let me see her," said Alan sharply.

He was shown into the drawing-room. Mrs. Elford was sitting by the fire, a newspaper on her lap.

"No, I didn't send for the nurse, doctor. Why should I? I haven't felt as well for a long time."

"There must be some mistake," he said, and hurried home.

His housekeeper had made mistakes before, but now she was emphatic.

"Where is the letter that came for Miss Garden?'

" It's in her room, I think."

" Let me have the key."

He ran across the yard, flew up the steps, and, opening the door, lit the gas. The letter and envelope were on the table. He took one glance and his heart almost stood still. He knew that writing ; Jane should have known it. It was unmistakably the hand of Charles Peace.

" Do you want me, doctor ? "

Dixon heard him running down the stairs.

" Yes ; harness the bay and put him in the trap."

" Anything wrong, doctor ? " Dixon came pattering down to the stables.

" Miss Garden's gone away, and I'm rather worried about her. Send the boy round to Sergeant Eltham's house and tell him I want him urgently. If he can't find him, we'll go to the station."

He returned to the house and closely questioned the frightened woman. She had nothing to tell him, except that she had found the letter in the letter-box and there had been a sharp rat-tat preceding it. She had looked out—this Peace had not noticed—but could see nothing except the lights of a trap on the other side of the road some distance away.

Then there flashed upon the doctor an earlier experience of Jane's : the groom with the steel-rimmed glasses and the pony cart, who had followed her. There was a hundred to one chance that there might be something in this.

Going up to his bedroom, he unlocked a drawer and took out a long-barrelled Service revolver, a relic of his army days. He broke the breach and loaded it. Peace would be an unfortunate man if he met Dr. Alan Mainford that night.

Putting the revolver into his overcoat pocket, he came downstairs again. He could guess what had happened. Somebody had picked up the girl near the Elfords' house, in which case he would continue in the same direction she had taken, which was towards the south. Peace would hardly double back through the town, where the trap could be identified and traced.

If Madame Stahm were still in England there might be an explanation for the disappearance. He would have driven straight out to Brinley Hall and searched the place from basement to attic. But the Hall was shut up, its presiding genius had departed.

This could only be the work of Peace.

Baldy Eltham came in half-dressed. He had been sleeping after a day and a night's search for a wanted man. Alan told him the story briefly, and by this time the trap was at the door.

" You'd better call at the Central Station. It's going to be difficult to get any more men out on the job. The reserves are dead beat. You think it was Peace in the pony trap, do you ? I've seen the man half a dozen times—wears a sort of dark green livery coat and a top hat with a cockade. I can't see any likeness to him, though. He's a cunning devil, and we know he does disguise himself."

They were only a few minutes at the station and then went back to the road in which Mrs. Elford's house stood. They found a policeman who had seen the cart, and remembered seeing the nurse. Jane wore a long veil for a bonnet, and this was flying out behind her when the cart had passed the officer.

" We're on the right track, at any rate. We'll make for the Derby road."

They drove as far as the cross-roads, and here they

had a check. Since the general alarm had been sent out for Peace, a mounted officer had been on duty day and night at this point. He had taken careful note of all the traffic, which was not considerable at this time of the night, but he had seen no trap answering the rough description they gave.

It was curious, but quite usual, that although the pony cart had been seen by a dozen different people, no two agreed as to its colour or shape. Baldy thought it was a dark blue; an officer at the station was equally sure it was varnished brown.

"We'll go on as far as Brinley," said Alan, and sent the long-striding bay flying along the hard road.

There were very few habitations, and these he noted as they passed.

"Who lives in that cottage?" He pointed with his whip.

"I don't know. It's been empty some time, then a gentleman took it some months ago—a Mr. Gray."

Brinley drew blank, and here they had definite negative news. The place had been under observation by the county constabulary, and the man on duty almost opposite the entrance gates was very definite that nothing had entered or left that night.

"The gates were padlocked anyway, and there's no other way of reaching the house," he said.

Alan stopped at the local inn to water and rest the horse.

It was one o'clock in the morning when they got up into the trap and began their return journey.

CHAPTER XXXII

PEACE eyed the girl critically and admiringly. She was pale, but she showed none of the signs of fear he expected. She was looking at him intently, trying to pierce his disguise and reconstruct the evil face she knew.

She saw now how perfectly he had hidden every characteristic feature—except those glowing, animal eyes of his. Those she would have known anywhere in any disguise.

" What are you going to do ? " she asked.

" I'm going to keep you here for a day or two, and see if we can persuade that doctor of yours to do me a little favour. Now, listen, miss. I'll do you no harm. I'll swear it on the Bible. I'm a gentleman. You do what I tell you and nowt will come of this. If you don't—well, I can only be hung once ! "

There was some relief in this news. She was being held as hostage, then : he had no personal venom against her.

" Remember the time when you and me met, lass ? " he asked.

He sat astride a chair, his arms resting on the back, feasting his eyes upon her.

" I said to her ladyship : ' That's a nice nuss you've got,' and I said to her : ' What about me taking her out for a stroll and showing her the sights of Sheffield ? ' "

She wished he wouldn't look at her so continuously. She turned her own eyes away, hoping to induce a

relaxation of his scrutiny, but when she looked again he was still regarding her with that same steadfast, desiring stare.

"The doctor's sweetheart, ain't you? I heard him talking to you the other night. You didn't know I was there, but I was. Charles Peace is everywhere. A hundred pound reward for me, me girl, but they'll never take me. I'm too clever for them. Listen to that!"

He thumped his waistcoat and she heard the dull chink of money.

"The doctor! I could buy him up! Do you know what he did to me? Took a whip to me! And do you know why he did it? Because of my little joke about being your father." He chuckled. Mr. Peace was in high spirits.

"What do you want of the doctor?" she asked.

"What do I want of the doctor?" he repeated. "Well, for one thing I want him to give me a little bottle of stuff that he's got in his poison cupboard. I tried to get it the other day."

She opened her eyes wide.

"The phial of chemicals that Carton gave him?"

He nodded eagerly.

"Have you seen it, miss?"

"No," she said. "But the doctor hasn't got it."

He smiled at this.

"Don't you tell me no lies! I know the doctor's got it. I tell you it's in his poison cupboard. I'd have had it, too, if that flat-footed copper hadn't come in."

"He hasn't got it," she insisted. "Carton called two or three days ago, and the doctor gave it to him."

He grinned again.

"That's comic, that is. Carton called, did he? Why, he wouldn't dare put his nose in Sheffield. I'd snuff him out! He knows what Charles Peace is."

"I tell you he called," she insisted desperately. "He came to pay back a sovereign the doctor had lent him to take him out of Sheffield on the night of the Banner Cross murder."

It was strange and terrible to think that she was sitting at that moment *vis à vis* the very murderer, the loathsome little man with a price on his head, and the scaffold looming before him.

Peace was impressed.

"You tell me the truth, my girl, or look out for yourself! If they catch me, I hang, and they can't hang me twice, can they, whatever I do? I could murder you, and they could still only hang me once—if they caught me. Not that I'm going to murder you—don't be frightened, love. You're better-looking than Kate, and you're a lady. I've always been partial to ladies. Now just you tell me about Carton, and don't tell no lies. A lady shouldn't tell no lies."

"He came to see Dr. Mainford," she repeated, "to pay him back the money. The doctor drove him from Banner Cross to the station on the night of the murder. But perhaps you know that?"

He didn't know it, but this story fitted in with the remarkable rapidity of Carton's movements, which had enabled him to catch the last train to London.

"The doctor told him he still had the phial, that he was afraid of losing it, and asked him to take it back. He took it back."

"Where does Carton live?"

"I don't know—he's in London somewhere."

He looked at her suspiciously.

" I don't believe it. You're telling me this because you think I'll let you go."

He got up from his chair and, walking across to where she sat by the table, took her chin in his hand and lifted up her face to his.

" You're better-looking than Kate Dyson," he said. " You're a beauty."

The touch of her soft throat set him a-quiver. The dark eyes glowed like dull fire. To show fear now would be fatal : she pushed his hand aside gently.

" Mr. Peace, why do you stay in this neighbourhood ? You know there's a reward for you, and that the police are looking for you ? "

" They don't know I'm here."

She nodded.

" They know. You left one of your cartridges behind in the doctor's dispensary."

He started at this.

" I dropped a cartridge, did I ? Yes, I did an' all ! Well, anybody might drop a cartridge. Who said it was mine ? "

Was she talking too much, she wondered. She must risk that, make him think of his danger, of anything but her.

" Sergeant Eltham said it was the same kind of cartridge that had killed Mr. Dyson—they know you're here ; they've been searching the town for you. Why don't you go away ? "

He grinned at this.

" Searching the town ? And where was Charles Peace ? Driving through the town as bold as brass ! I got a policeman to hold my pony's head to-night—that'll make you laugh. A policeman looking for me, and he held the reins and I gave him sixpence for his

trouble. No, nuss, you're staying here. I've got a nice little room for you, right up in the roof; you lay snug there till the morning and then you'll write a letter to the doctor and I'll get it sent to him."

She got up.

"Which is the way?" she said.

A room to herself gave her at any rate a fort to hold, flimsy or strong.

He took up the lighted lamp.

"Go first," he said, and she went ahead of him up the stairs, through the bedroom.

"Open that door."

She thought it was a cupboard, filled with old dresses, and he was flattered.

"I did that. Nobody would think there were stairs there. Push through the dresses, lass, and turn to the right."

She went up before him, stooping her head to avoid contact with the sloping ceiling.

"Here's your room. You stay here quiet."

He could not take his eyes off her.

"I'll leave you the lamp. There's another downstairs. I'll take the key out of that door." He leered at her. "Nobody's going to hurt you, lass, though I'd get no more for it. They can only hang a man once if he commits twenty-six million murders!"

She said nothing, and heard his retreating footsteps with heartfelt thankfulness.

There was a chair, a small washstand and a bed in the room. The water jug had been newly filled. She poured out a glass and, raising it to her lips with a trembling hand, drank eagerly.

The place was stuffy, airless. She looked round for a window, but there was none. Listening at the head

of the stairs, she heard him go down to the ground floor. His heavy boots sounded hollowly on the bare boards. There was no time to be lost: she began to draw the bed across the room. The castors squeaked a little, and she paused, listening for some sound from below. She heard a voice singing: it was Peace, and he was singing a hymn!

Desperately she pulled at the bed. It ran readily across the floor, and she clamped the head of it against the closed door. But she knew a strong man could push it aside, and she must find something to keep it in position. The opposite wall was too far away, the articles of furniture too few to jam the door tight.

Searching the room, she found a hammer and a paper of nails lying on a shelf. Workmen had been here, and evidently the tool had been overlooked because of the height of the shelf. Then to her joy she found that the thick shelf was movable, and lifted it down. Fitting one end against the rails at the back of the bed, she began nailing the loose end into the floor. She had never used a hammer before, but her very terror gave her skill. She heard the clatter of feet on the stairs below, and worked frantically.

He was shouting at her, but she did not desist. It was a bungling job. If she had not used twice as many nails as were necessary she would have failed. His fist came hammering at the door.

"What's the row? What are you doing?"

He tried to open the door. The bed moved a fraction of an inch, but the board held in its place.

"Open the door and let me in!" he howled. "I gave you a chance. Now you're going to get what you asked for, my girl."

She waited, breathless, exhausted, leaning on the

end of the bed and lending her weight to take the strain he was imposing on the barrier.

"Got the bed here, have you? . . ."

He poured out a volume of foulest threats. She, who had seen the worst of humanity, had never till then plumbed the depths of its vileness.

Presently he became calm.

"Open the door, miss. Don't be silly—I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head. You can trust old Charles Peace. I've never harmed a lady in my life. Don't get my temper up, miss—it'll be all the worse for you. I'll let you go. Will you open the door?"

"No," she said.

He expected her to scream, to be crying, to be broken by terror. The steadiness of her voice took him aback and to some extent calmed him.

"What's the use of being silly, miss?" he wheedled. "You can't sleep if I'm hammering on the door all night, can you? Put the bed back in its place and I'll let you have the key."

"Put it under the door," she said.

A long pause.

"Here it is, miss. Put your fingers under."

But she was not to be caught.

Another interregnum of silence.

"You don't think I can't get in, do you? Charlie Peace could go through a steel door: he's done it millions of times! I'll have the panels out of that before you can say Jack Robinson, and when I get in, me lady, you'll be sorry you was born."

He went downstairs again, and was gone a long time. He came back, and she heard the rasp of metal cutting wood, and after a while the bright end of a bit showed in one corner of the panel. Then the end

of a thin saw thrust through, and as it did she struck it, breaking it off short. He howled his imprecations at her, threw his weight against the door, and for a moment she thought that the barrier would give way.

Again he went down, and was absent for an even longer time. He was searching the house for a hatchet, and when he failed to find one, continued his search in the stable. He found an axe with a rotten handle. It took him some time to improvise a new one with the help of a stable yard broom. Then she heard him coming up, and waited.

"Are you going to open the door?"

She did not answer.

Crash! The panel split under the impact of the axe head.

"Get aside if you don't want to be hurt!" he yelled, and struck again.

Not only the panel but the supporting frame splintered. There was an aperture wide enough for a man to scramble through. Beating down the jagged edges of the wood with the back of the axe, he wriggled through on to the bed.

The beard was gone, though stray hairs still clung to the bristle on his cheeks. Here was Charles Peace in all his ugliness, in all his menace. She could not mistake the message of his eyes, but she stood calmly in the centre of the room waiting for him.

Peace saw a woman subdued, ready for surrender, her hands hanging limply by her side. He never suspected the hammer that the folds of her dress concealed.

"Got you, me lady! You remember what I told you? They can only hang me once. You'll write that letter, and be glad to write that letter. You'll do it

because you love me. Women get used to me—they dote on me . . . worship the ground I walk on."

He was coming towards her stealthily, cat-like, his long fingers curved like the paws of a wild animal.

" I like the looks of you," he went on huskily. " I've never seen a young lady I liked so much . . . you brought it on yourself . . . they can only hang me once."

With incredible swiftness she struck, turned sick as she heard the thud of the blow. Peace went down on his knees and sprawled forward on the floor, blood on his temple.

She dropped the hammer and leapt on to the bed. She had seen the cover that hid the skylight, and guessed that there was a window beyond. In a second she was on the bed, unbolted the cover and dropped it. She pushed up the circular window with such force that it fell back on the slates. She must have a light of some kind. The man was moving on the floor. She flew across the room and took the lamp, and, hastily snatching up a chair, planted it insecurely on the bed and mounted.

Peace was rising to his feet. She had not a second to lose. She pushed the lamp high over her head, and with a superhuman effort drew herself up on to the sloping roof. It was terribly steep; she could not possibly keep her foothold and the lamp, she thought. Her shoes slid on the damp tiles, and she kicked them off one by one, and, setting her teeth, scrambled up to the roof ridge.

It was a still night. The lamp flickered but did not go out. Somebody must see her—there must be neighbours.

The dark bulk of the man's head and shoulders came

through the broken skylight. He was half mad with rage, and at the sight of him she screamed again and again. He scrambled up after her; his hands had almost grasped her dress when his nailed boots slid on the tiles and, but for their tripping the gutter, he would have fallen to the ground.

She made another attempt. She was screaming now —somebody would hear her. In his rage was terror. The nearest house was a mile away, but there might be somebody passing along the road. Something *was* coming. She saw two bright lights appear round the bend of the road, heard the beat of horse's hooves and waved the lamp frantically. At that moment Peace reached up and gripped her knee. She kicked herself free, but he grabbed at her ankle.

He made another attempt to reach the roof tree some distance from her, and began working his way along. He had not seen the cart, but suddenly he heard the sound of men's voices, and, looking down, saw the trap at the door and somebody leap out. There was only one thing to do: he slid down the roof towards the back of the house and caught the gutter in his hands. There was a crack; the cast-iron gutter broke, and he dropped into a bush. As he ran round the corner of the house he drew his revolver and fired point-blank at the man who barred him.

It was Baldy, and as he staggered back to avoid the consequences of a second shot, Peace flung past him. He reached the front garden when a pencil of flame leaped from the other corner of the house and a bullet whizzed so close to his face that he thought he had been hit. Screaming with terror and rage, he turned and fired at the second man, and an answering shot came back instantly.

There was only one hope: he dashed through the gate, banging it behind him. The restive horse was prancing at the sound of the shots. Peace was in the driver's seat in a second; the whip flopped down, and the maddened beast leaped forward.

Alan was not concerned about the escape. He was looking anxiously at the dark figure on the roof. The lamp had gone out: it had slipped from her hand and smashed; the fragments were at his feet.

"Is that you, Jane? Are you all right? Can you hold on until I get up?"

"Yes, I'm frightened, but I'm quite all right," came her reassuring voice. "But I can't get back the way I came."

"Is it possible to force the door or the window?"

Baldy, searching at the back of the house, found a ladder that reached to the height of the roof, and ran up. It was a nervous task in the darkness of the night, bringing the girl to earth. She was trembling in every limb; felt physically sick; and sat for ten minutes on the high stone doorstep of the cottage, her head on her hands, whilst Baldy went round and put the pony in the little cart.

By the time he was ready she had recovered.

"I feel I ought to faint. I suppose it's because I'm not what Mr. Peace calls a lady."

"You're sure he didn't hurt you?" Alan was beside himself with anxiety.

She smiled.

"That is the one thing I'm quite sure about," she said.

All the way back to Sheffield he was cursing his bad marksmanship.

"The light was bad, and I'm out of practice, I suppose. There is no other excuse."

He would not allow her to go to the stable that night. Peace was quite capable of returning. He sent her up to his own room, and sat up for the rest of the night, waiting for Sergeant Eltham to report.

Alan's trap and his distressed bay had been found abandoned in a field near Mansfield, and the horse was being taken care of locally.

"There goes eighty guineas' worth of good horse-flesh," said Alan; "the brute!"

He was not speaking of the horse.

The trains from Mansfield were being watched all down the line, A man answering the description of Peace had been seen near the station, but nobody seemed to have noticed whether he got on the train or not.

All day long false clues abounded, and the usual innocent citizens were placed under arrest or observation. For the second time Peace had entirely vanished. There was some interest when the body of a man was taken out of the Trent, and in many particulars the description tallied with the wanted murderer.

"We've sent a man down to identify him," said Baldy, "but bless your heart, it's not Charlie! There's an old saying and a true one—a man who is born to be hanged will never be drowned——"

"I'm so tired of hearing that," said Alan. "He may probably never be arrested, but leave me the hope that he'll get drunk and fall into the canal!"

At the first opportunity he saw Jane Garden alone.

"You are staying in this house permanently, Jane," he said firmly. "And what's more, you're going to

figure in the newspaper. 'After a brief honeymoon, Mr. and Mrs. Alan Mainford returned to their well-known surgery.'"

She smiled faintly at this; then a look of alarm came to her face.

"Do the newspapers know—about last night?"

He shook his head.

"For some reason or other the police are not anxious to advertise the fact that they have had Charles Peace as a close neighbour," he said drily.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A LETTER arrived at Berne, via the National Bank. It was in a strange handwriting, and the composition was more literate than was usual.

"DEAR MADAME" (it began), "I am Charles Peace, who you know served you faithfully and suffered cruelly in your loyal service. Dear Madame, I am in a terrible position owing to the way I have looked after your interests, and I can't get any money because of the title deeds of the cottage. Dear Madame, could you send the title deeds to me in the name of Gray, and I can get them transferred to another gentleman who will pay me well for them, because I am in very sad circumstances and starving to death because of the way I looked after your interests, turning out in the middle of the cold nights to play the fiddle when you was feeling poorly, and all the trouble I got into with the police because of you know who being killed by

accident which was not design, which I had no intention of killing the man, because nothing is further from my thoughts than taking human life which is sacred according to the Bible I honour. Dear Madame, if you will send the title deeds to a friend of mine, Mr. Thompson, 5 East Terrace, Evelina Road, Peckham, London, he will see that I get justice done to me which I have never had since I was a boy owing to the perjury of the police which as you know are always ready to swear away a man's life for a few shillings. And that nurse turned against me. She is a low woman as you can't deny when I tell you she is carrying on with the doctor and brazen about it. She has sweared my life away and your life away too, and the doctor tried to murder me and the police tried to murder me by firing arms at me which it is against the law for the police to carry firearms and they have kept it quiet or the Government would have had his coat off his back. It's a bad day for England if police carry firearms because they are not trained to use them and all sorts of accidents would happen as you will see from the piece of newspaper I have put in this letter when the Home Secretary said in the Houses of Parliament that the police must not use firearms and it is against public policy. I had to come away from Sheffield for my life and left behind the money which you so humbly gave me, and I am now destitute and starving and God knows what will become of me. But He looketh after the fallen sparrows and comforteth them. If you have Bibles in Switzerland you will see this. God knows how I shall live through to-day and to-morrow. I am weak with want of food, so, dear madame, please send me the title deeds before the end of the month because you are my last hope

and if the police take me, which they'll be clever to do, I shall have to tell them everything about Mr. Lamonte and the goings on at the house which I have seen with my own eyes and can bring witnesses. Is there any justice? No, there is none. Oh, God, who seest thy servant inflicted by thy enemies, lift up thy hand and help thy humble servant.

"Yours obediently and respectfully,

"CHARLES PEACE.

"J. THOMPSON."

Mr. Peace, remembering in time that, being a foreigner, Madame Stahm was probably a Roman Catholic, had drawn a neat crucifix with emanations.

Madame Stahm read through this epistle, glanced at the newspaper cutting, and handed the letter back to her husband.

"Tell him to go to the devil," she said.

Mr. Baumgarten would have addressed himself to this task with considerable pleasure if he had not glanced at the back of the second foolscap sheet and seen the postscript:

"DEAR MADAM,—The cristals are safe. The doctor gave them to Carton and I am looking for Carton. You will hear from me by return of post.

"C. P."

"Do you believe him?" asked Baumgarten.

"Do you?" she challenged.

He pursed his lips.

"I don't know. I think I do. Possibly it would be safest to send him a little money—a thousand francs."

She was not especially eager to send money to anybody.

"We haven't heard from the reptile for a year—more than that, Peter. If the crystals could be recovered they would have been in his hands by now."

"Nevertheless, my dear, I should send him a thousand francs," said Baumgarten.

He could afford to be judicial in the matter, because it was not his thousand francs.

Mr. Peace received the letter addressed to Mr. Thompson, because at the moment he was Mr. Thompson. He was not starving: he was eating a large steak in a comfortably furnished room. He had taken kindly to his new life in London, as his wife had been pleasantly complaisant. There was a Mrs. Thompson in addition to a Mrs. Peace, who called herself Ward. She had appeared out of the blue, a bold throw-back to pre-Dyson days, an especially well-favoured lady in the matter of looks, being blonde and winsome; more to the point, comfortable, in the sense that she and Mrs. Peace—the real Mrs. Peace, who lived in the basement—were on the friendliest terms.

The little man with the dark face was popular in the neighbourhood; attended a local church; made and mended kites for small boys; manufactured toys of all kinds and distributed them gratuitously. He had a kindly word for everybody. His neighbours said of him that he was quite the gentleman, which had been said before by witnesses who had a better opportunity of testing his gentility.

On the whole he was pleased with himself, though there had been one or two irritating circumstances that had occurred since his arrival in London. For example, the man Harbron, who had been sentenced to death for the murder of Police Constable Cock, had

been reprieved by a pusillanimous Home Secretary. By this reprieve he had robbed Peace of a permanent illustration that justice sometimes miscarries. He could cite the case if ever misfortune overtook him ; if necessary, plead guilty to the crime to prove his point. He felt that the reprieve robbed him of some importance, and was glad that he had not followed his inclination, which was to go to Manchester when the petition for reprieve was being circulated and put his name to it. He would have done this, because he was quite certain that the petition would produce no effect. Petitions never did. The petitions he had sent to the Home Secretary from Dartmoor, Chatham, Wakefield, a dozen prisons ; the heartrending appeals he had made to the official heart, and which probably had never gone beyond the cunning governor of the prison, were proof of this. The world was full of injustice : he used to enlarge on this theme when he had company at No. 5 East Terrace, for he often gave musical evenings and played on a Spanish guitar, to the delight of his guests.

There were people who thought he had once had something to do with the law, he was such an authority on the subject, and this surmise was so near the truth that he never denied it.

They were broadminded people in Peckham ; they did not object to the touch of colour in his blood, for how else might he attain to that swarthy complexion ? He was not above admitting relationship with African kings. Generally it was believed that he was a much-travelled and widely-read man. He was thinner than he had been, wore glasses on occasions, and the deep wolf eyes had acquired a benevolent glint.

People liked Mrs. Thompson very much ; they did

the nearest police station. The delinquent officer would have been reprimanded, but Peace generously pleaded for him and excused his zeal on account of his youth.

Thereafter this particular policeman always touched his helmet when Mr. Thompson passed. Peace got more satisfaction out of this than he would have done if a gold medal had been pinned on his bosom for spotless integrity.

Sometimes his operations carried him far afield. He liked to indulge in travel, and on a certain Sunday morning he was sniffing the air of Brighton as he strolled leisurely along the front, when a newly-married couple on their honeymoon drove past. The girl turned with a little cry. She couldn't be mistaken.

"What is it, darling?" asked Alan, looking back.

He saw that her face had gone white.

"Aren't you well?"

"No, no. Only I thought I saw somebody I knew—somebody who is dead."

She lied recklessly, for she remembered that spiteful snub-nosed revolver which never left the little man's pocket, and it was the second day of her honeymoon and she wanted life and many bright years with the man who sat at her side.

He had a trick of reading her thoughts, and when they got back to the hotel from their drive:

"You saw Peace?" he said, and she nodded. "On the front?"

"Yes, darling. He was walking—I am sure it was he. Don't go and look—please, please!"

"I do not intend joining any more search parties after that little villain," he laughed, "but I think the police should know."

He sent a note round to the inspector, who was at first sceptical, and then, when he had interviewed Jane, very much alive to the possibilities of a capture.

Mr. Thompson had not seen the girl and was quite oblivions of the recognition. Later in the afternoon he was having tea in a flamboyant restaurant, when he heard somebody say :

" Did you hear that Charles Peace has been seen in Brighton ? It's a fact—a bobby told me."

Peace paid his bill and left the restaurant at his leisure. He went back to London via Shoreham and Littlehampton. He was alarmed and worried. Who had recognised him ? His curiosity was piqued, and curiosity was a vice in a man who needed no embellishment of his viciousness. It couldn't be an inhabitant of the seaside town, because he had never been there before. It must have been a visitor, and he remembered seeing on the bookstall at the station a visitors' list. He had thought at the time what a joke it would be if somebody had put in " Charles Peace."

A few days later the bookstall clerk at Brighton station received a request for a copy of the visitors' list, two penny stamps being enclosed. Mr. Thompson settled himself down to an enjoyable evening, scanning the long columns of names. Presently he found what he wanted : " Mr. and Mrs. Alan Mainford."

There were two surprises here. He looked up over his glasses at his companion.

" He's made an honest woman of her after all."

" Who ? " asked Mrs. Thompson.

" A certain party," said Peace. " I used to keep company with her, but she drank too much for me."

So he had married the nurse, and they were the people who had given him away. For all they cared

he might have been in a police cell now, facing the certainty of the gallows. A cold rage possessed him. Honeymooning . . . she probably had to marry him in a hurry. He brooded on this, became an assiduous collector of south coast visitors' lists and located them at Bognor. Peace took an afternoon train, arrived at Bognor after dark, with no especial plan of campaign in his head, but with a general bias towards wickedness.

It was a poky little place, with scarcely any front, and few people were visible, for the sky was overcast and a chill wind blew down from the north-east. He knew their hotel, and he kept watch opposite the entrance, and later in the evening saw them both come out and drive away. He waited till midnight, but they did not return, and he made friends with an outside porter.

"Mr. and Mrs. Mainford? Oh, they've gone away to London—left two hours ago."

"I didn't see any baggage."

"That went on to the station before them."

Peace trudged in search of a lodging, and on his way threw into the sea the small bottle of vitriol that he had purchased at a local chemist's.

Gloat over him, would they? Laugh at him, sitting in the condemned cell and waiting for Marwood to come in? Everybody knew what Marwood did: it was the talk of the prisons, common gossip. Every man discharged from a convict prison told the same story. There was Marwood, stocky, broad-shouldered, bearded, the dangling straps in one hand and offering the other.

"I am very sorry I have got to do this, but it's my duty and I hope you will forgive me."

And the prisoner saying: "Will it hurt?" and

Marwood saying he would make it very comfortable for him.

That was the kind of morning this nurse wanted to give him. His heart was bitter with hate. All the way up to London the next morning he thought out ingenious methods by which they could be brought to ruin. Suppose they had a baby? They were bound to have one some day, and in the morning they'd wake up and find it gone, and a note in the cradle saying: "Charles Peace never forgives." Probably he'd throw it in the river or under a steam-roller, or they might never know what happened to it. He'd give it to gipsies. And you know what gipsies did to children.

He had wasted two good days at a time when the thousand francs were nearly exhausted, and the profits from his evening excursions were abnormally low.

On a Saturday evening he liked to frequent some busy marketing place. His old profession came back to him readily, and his fingers were as nimble as ever they were. He could take a purse out of a woman's back pocket and she'd never know she'd lost it. He made one or two good "gets"—fat purses, crammed with the week's wages, which women had taken out to provide for the week-end marketing. Working women mostly. It was his practice to justify himself, and his main justification was: "This'll teach them a lesson," though what the lesson was he never explained, even to himself.

He was in High Street, Deptford, one night; he had worked Broadway, and had turned into the crowded market street, which looked full of possibilities. He saw a stoutish man walking in front of him, smoking a pipe, which he filled from a silver tobacco box, and

the tobacco box went into the man's side jacket pocket. It wasn't worth much, but every little helped. Peace passed him, glancing away towards the street and dropped his hand into the other's pocket nonchalantly. His fingers had closed on the box when his wrist was gripped.

"Hi! What's the game?"

He turned and stared at his victim.

"Oh, my God!" said Mr. Carton, his jaw dropping.

In a moment Peace had recovered his presence of mind.

"Come down this side street; I want to talk to you," he said.

Carton obeyed meekly. He, too, was conscious of that revolver which never left Peace day or night.

He lived in terror of Peace and his ruthlessness; more dangerous now, with the rope hanging over his head.

"That is a very pleasant surprise, I must say."

They had reached a dark, narrow and ill-lit street, and Peace had stopped him against a wooden gate that formed the entrance to a back yard.

"I—I didn't have time to see you," stammered Carton. "Lord! You're changed, Mr. Peace. I couldn't believe it was you at first. What have you done with your face?"

"Never mind my face. Where's that bottle?"

Carton licked his dry lips.

"It's like this——" he began.

"Where's that bottle? Don't shilly-shally about. I'm a desperate man, Carton. I'm starving because of you. Where's the bottle?"

"It's up at the house." The man blurted out the truth.

"What house?"

" Where I'm working."

" Where is that ? "

There was a second's hesitation, which was a second too long.

" In Lewisham."

" You're a liar. What's it doing there ? "

" The doctor gave it to me," said the man earnestly. " I didn't want it. I asked him to take charge of it because it was valuable. I might have thrown it away but I wouldn't do a dirty trick like that on you, Mr. Peace, so I asked the doctor to look after it, and then when I went up to Sheffield to pay him some money I owed him, he handed it to me back. I knew sooner or later you'd turn up, and I dursn't get rid of it, so I gave it to the governor to mind."

Peace drew a long breath.

" If I did the right thing, do you know what I'd do to you ? I'd shoot you right through the heart. If I wasn't a Christian man who never took life, which the Maker of all things giveth to us, I'd kill you, you hound ! "

Carton was shaking with terror. He saw a tragic end to an evening which he had hoped would finish more pleasantly, for he had a young lady, contemplated matrimony in three rooms with the use of a kitchen, and all his pleasant dreams were to be wiped out—unless——

" I can get the bottle for you. The governor's away on holiday just now, and I don't exactly know where it's kept ; but I swear to you, Mr. Peace——"

" My name's not Peace. Don't call me that. Call me Ward. And don't swear—take not the Name in vain, Carton. Was you brought up as a heathen or wasn't you ? Where do you live ? "

Courage came to Carton with a vision of the fresh-faced girl he was to meet that night.

"I shan't tell you," he said doggedly. "If you want to shoot, start shooting!"

A certain reckless courage came struggling through his fear. His voice grew loud. A man and a woman, passing on the opposite side of the street, turned and stopped in anticipation of a fight—a form of entertainment which costs nothing to see and provides a topic of conversation for a week.

"Shut up, will you!" hissed Peace. "Who's going to shoot you? I'm a reasonable man, and you're a reasonable man. I forgive everybody who's done me harm. When can you get the bottle?"

"In a couple of weeks," said the man sullenly.

"You needn't be afraid of me knowing who your boss is," said Peace. "I could go up and tell him the kind of man you are, all about your low life and the time you've had——"

"And perhaps you'd tell him about yourself?" said Carton, exulting in his new-found courage. "That would do you a fat lot of good, for him to know you was Charlie Peace!"

Mr. Peace restrained himself with an effort.

"I tell you I wouldn't go to him and split on you."

"It wouldn't matter if you did," said the other defiantly. "When I took this job I told him everything, except that I'd made friends with a murderer."

Peace winced at this. That any man should be ashamed of his acquaintance with him was an unpardonable affront.

"Where do you live?" he asked again.

"Find out," said the other.

"I'll find out," growled Peace. "There's nothing

I couldn't find out. I'll track and trail you wherever you go. I'll search every house in Greenwich "—he was looking at the man—" and Blackheath—ah, that's where you live, my boy! I'll track and trail you there, and I'll never leave you!"

"You can go to hell," said Carton, shook off the detaining hand, and stalked majestically back to the High Street.

CHAPTER XXXIV

PEACE waited until he had turned the corner, crossed the High Street quickly, and, taking cover behind two stout women who were moving in his direction, kept the man under observation.

There was a possibility—a grave possibility that if Carton was too much terrified he might blab. The man walked on. He had already located his shadow, and took a bold step. A policeman was standing under the railway arch, jotting down notes in his book. Carton walked up to him.

"Excuse me, sir, could you tell me where Evelyn Road is?"

The policeman pointed. The accusing finger moved in the direction of the alarmed spy. Peace turned and walked quickly away. He was taking no chances. Carton might have been pointing him out; on the other hand, he might have been bluffing. Peace had often gone to a policeman to impress somebody who was suspicious of him.

From a safer place of observation he watched. The constable and Carton parted. The ex-butler was moving in his direction. Peace waited in the cover of a

side road for his former companion to appear. He waited ten minutes; there was no sign of Carton. But it was too late: the man had slipped into Deptford Road Station in time to catch a Greenwich train.

That was where he lived then—Blackheath! He cursed himself for not having given the man an address to which he could send the crystals. Probably it was true that he couldn't get them. And now, if he found them, how could he pass them on to their lawful owner? That was a mistake: Peace was magnanimous enough to acknowledge it to himself. The next time he met Carton he must adopt another attitude.

For weeks afterwards he haunted Blackheath, always by night; but Carton stayed indoors after dark: he knew that that was the only time his enemy would be abroad. He had spoken the truth: his employer was away in France, and the phial was locked up somewhere perhaps in the safe.

The little man's luck was out. Again he was stopped by the police and this time taken to a police station and searched. It happened in Peckham High Street on a Saturday night. There had been some complaints about pocket-picking, and special plain-clothes officers had been detailed for observation. Peace had time to drop the purses which would have convicted him behind a barrel of meal outside a corn chandler's. When he was arrested he was volubly innocent. He had money, plenty of money, in his pocket, for he had emptied the purses as fast as he had taken them.

There was nobody to identify one sovereign from another, or one hard-earned florin from its neighbour.

"The papers are going to hear about this," said Peace, quivering with indignation as he was escorted to the door. "Here am I, a respectable householder,

dragged through the streets by a lot of common coppers and boys hooting at me! How can I go to chapel tomorrow and face my fellow-men and my Maker?"

"It's very unfortunate," said the tactful inspector, "but you must understand, Mr. Thompson, that there has been a lot of pocket-picking on Saturday nights in this neighbourhood, and we're here to protect the poor as well as the rich."

"And punish the wrong-doer," said Peace. "That's the text—'Protect the children of the poor and punish the wrong-doer.'"

The inspector, startled to discover that he had been quoting Scripture with the same unconsciousness as Molière's gentleman spoke prose, offered his personal apologies.

"If you like to make a case, and submit a written statement to me, I will see that it goes forward to the proper quarter." he said. "Our men are only doing what they think is right, and they were under the impression that you behaved in a suspicious manner. The woman said she brushed against you——"

"A common woman like that! I wouldn't even brush against her," said Peace. "I'm a gentleman, as I can prove . . ."

He went home, bristling with wrath, and arrived at East Terrace in time to hand his wife two sovereigns to do her Saturday's marketing before the shops closed —Sunday morning marketing he would never countenance.

"Mind where you keep that two pounds," he warned her as she went out. "There's a lot of pickpockets down by Rye Lane."

He gave up his night searches for Carton and went out to look by day, choosing Sunday. He sauntered

from morning till night up and down the strip of asphalt pavement which fringes Blackheath, and it was on the third Sunday that he found his man. He was walking with a young lady who was beautifully attired, and from their attitude one to the other he gathered that they were something more than friends.

"Old enough to be her father," he muttered.

All the afternoon he dogged them, through Greenwich Park to the Observatory, down the hill to the Naval College, and along to the church gates. Here were eating houses, where you could buy a good tea with shrimps for sixpence.

He waited patiently until they had satisfied their gross appetites, picked them up when they boarded a horse tram, and followed them through Greenwich to the foot of Blackheath Hill, where they alighted. He had gone up to the top roof of the tramcar, though it was not at all outside weather. He waited till their backs were turned, stepped off the noisy vehicle while it was in motion, and followed them up Blackheath Hill, past a police station with which he was to be better acquainted some day.

At the top of the hill they parted. Carton kissed her, raising his hat in a gentlemanly way as he did so.

"Old enough to be her father," said the disgusted Peace.

She wasn't a bad little piece, either. He had a good look at her as she passed him. He liked the way she walked, and wondered what her name was. Then he turned to follow his quarry, who strolled along, twirling a lah-de-da walking-stick—an elaborate piece of acting on the part of Carton, for, whilst Peace was observing the girl, the ex-butler had recognised him and knew that he had been followed.

He had made acquaintance with a footman at a house in St. John's Park. He knew the family were out that day, because he had been invited to tea. It was too late for tea, but not too late to deceive Mr. Peace. Unconcerned, he strolled through the gates, mounted the steps and pulled the bell, and, as luck would have it, it was his friend who opened the door to him.

"Hallo! You're late. I thought you weren't coming."

"Do you mind me stepping in? There's a man been following me all the afternoon."

The footman closed the door on him.

"Do you owe him money?" he asked naturally. "Or is he a girl's father or something?"

"I owe him a bit of money."

"Come on down in the kitchen," said the footman.

Peace made a note of the address: No. 2 St. John's Park. It looked a good house, too—a place you could "do" without a lot of trouble. There were men-servants, but they did not matter. It was the woman servants that gave all the trouble, screaming and squawking all over the place.

He came up two nights in succession to reconnoitre the house. Yes, it was easy enough, but where would the bottle be kept, supposing Carton had been speaking the truth? Apparently he himself didn't know. He resolved to get in touch with the man, but that was more easily planned than accomplished. Again he waited on the Sunday, but this time he took another post of observation—the foot of Blackheath Hill. He reasoned, knowing something of his fellow-men, that Carton would reverse his walk and start from the Blackheath Hill end and finish through the park, and he was not wrong.

Carton saw him when he mounted the tram, and, excusing himself to his young lady, climbed up on to the top.

"What are you following me about for?" he demanded truculently.

Peace was unusually mild.

"If I knew where I could write to you, or what name you was going under——"

"Carton is the name I'm going under," said Carton. "It may seem a bit funny to you, a man going under his own name."

"I know where you live, but I'm not going to call on your governor. All I want to know is, speaking as man to man: where does he keep that bottle?"

"It's in the safe, or else it's in one of the drawers of his desk. He's a gentleman in the City—keeps a lot of papers in his desk. They're always locked up. I shouldn't think it's in the safe, because I remember his opening a drawer and putting it in the desk when I gave it to him."

"That's all I want to know," said Peace. "Why the trouble? Why the lack of harmony? I'm not going to ask you for it; I'm not going to wait till this man comes back; I'm just going to take it. It ain't much to ask you to leave the kitchen door unfastened, is it?"

"You can go on asking me," said the exasperated Carton, "till you're blue in the face, till you choke yourself, till you drop dead on this very tram, and then I wouldn't do it. If you want to get into the house, get in, but don't ask me to help you. That's my last word to you."

He got up abruptly and went downstairs. His indignation seemed real. But there was, working at

the back of Carton's mind, a counter plan, which involved a supreme act of treachery, though he owed nothing to Peace but considerable disquietude of mind.

He had been promoted to butler at the modest establishment which he managed. It was nearly half a mile away from the house at St. John's Park ; it was on the same police beat, and as butler and dispenser of culinary favours he was friendly with the policeman, even with the sergeant, who sometimes dropped in to drink a forbidden glass of beer.

The sergeant either dropped in or popped in on Saturday night. There was a subtle distinction between the two acts. On the Monday night a sergeant popped in, which meant that he was not really on duty, and was at liberty to pay a friendly call, and with him Carton discussed the vulnerable character of certain houses on the heath.

" There have been a few burglaries, but none up here," said the sergeant, " or next to none."

To Carton's credit it must be said that he had taken the sergeant and the divisional inspector into his confidence regarding his own past, and the friendliness of the police force may be better understood from this fact.

" You know what I am, sergeant." They were sitting alone in the kitchen, but Carton lowered his voice. " I've been an old lag, but I know a better game. A lot of other old lags don't believe I've turned over a new leaf, and I get to hear things. It's not for me to give away people I've worked on the same landing with, but you're either on the side of the law or you're against it. Correct me if I'm wrong."

" There never was a truer statement," said the

sergeant earnestly, and added: "Have you heard anything?"

"I've heard a lot." Carton was very deliberate. "From information received—no names, no pack drill—I've got an idea there's going to be a job done at St. John's Park. Number Two is the number, but I can't tell you when."

The sergeant jotted down the information in his notebook.

"I don't want to be brought into this——"

"Naturally," said the sergeant; "and you won't be brought in."

They shook hands solemnly when they parted.

Did Peace have some premonition of coming danger? For the next six months he shunned Blackheath, confining himself to small burglaries in the middle-class districts that surround Dulwich.

He had made a survey of the West End, where at one time he thought good pickings could be found, but had learned, almost at a glance, the insuperable difficulties which confronted a single-handed worker. The place was too well lit; the mewses which form the backs of the big houses were too densely populated. It was impossible to get in with the servants. He confined himself to the "cook-parlourmaid houses" in the vicinity of Lordship Lane. But there was too much electro-plate there, and many of the imposing silver bowls that decorated front drawing-rooms were so thin tnat you could bend them with your finger. There was a lot of German silver about, too, and German silver is so called because it is not silver and was made in Birmingham.

Always at the back of his mind was that house on Blackheath, which had been rigorously watched and

guarded for three months, and which was in a condition of normal unprotection now.

The sergeant was gently reproachful.

"You made me look a bit of a fool, Carton, but I know your intentions were good," he said.

"I tell you I'm right," said Carton, stung to self-defence. "And what's more, sergeant, when you capture this fellow you're going to catch a man that'll make you famous."

"Nobody would make me famous," said the sergeant, who had been long enough in the force to have lost his illusions. "The inspector'll get a bit of the credit, but Scotland Yard will get most of it. You wouldn't like to tell me who it is?"

For one second Carton was tempted to tell the truth, and then he remembered the revolver.

"No, I wouldn't. But I can tell you he's armed—never goes about without a shooter."

The sergeant laughed.

"There's not many of them about, since Charles Peace got out of the country," he said, putting into words the prevalent police delusion.

Carton said nothing. He felt hurt at the inactivity of Peace. Had he lost his nerve, or was he suspicious? This thought made him sweat. He took to meeting his young lady in unusual places, which involved a considerable outlay in railway fares.

Every small man he met in the street was Peace; every noise he heard at night was the stealthy footstep of an armed and resentful burglar. Peace became an obsession to him, kept him awake at night, robbed him of sleep and comfort. His young lady noticed and remarked on the change.

"You're not half as loving as you used to be," she

complained, and hinted that there were as good fish in the sea as ever came out, which Carton had known all along.

Relief came unexpectedly, violently. Peace came to Blackheath, with no intention of burgling unless there was a fog, and there was no fog. He decided to make a third reconnaissance of the house. It was very quiet, and he passed into the garden and round to the back of the house without difficulty. He could hear no sound . . . such an opportunity might never offer again.

He did not realise then that the back of the house was visible from the avenue which connects Blackheath with St. John's Park ; and, even if he had, the complete quietude of the night—it was nearly two o'clock in the morning—would have encouraged him.

He took a jemmy from his pocket and made an attempt upon a window. It yielded readily and without sound. He found himself in the drawing-room, and, lighting a small dark lantern, his own invention, he made a quick survey of the valuables. There was no sense in devoting all his attention to a search for the crystals.

He took such articles as came to his hand, slipped them into his pocket and made his way to another room, where there was a desk. He had hardly started on this when he heard the sound of voices on the lawn outside. A policeman had seen his light from the avenue, and, summoning a brother constable, was crossing the lawn. Peace saw them and heard the front door bell ring. He thought he could still escape unobserved and, stuffing his jemmy into his trousers' pocket, he jumped to the ground and ran. He misjudged the distance.

The man at the front of the house came round to intercept him. He made a dive at the little man, but Peace fought him off. Turning, he doubled towards the bottom of the garden, the policeman at his heels. Suddenly Peace turned and his hand shot out. He was holding a revolver, clearly seen in the moonlight.

"Keep off, or by God I'll shoot you!" snarled Peace.

The policeman's reply was not heroic.

"You'd better not," he said.

Before the words were out, Peace fired—once, twice, three times. By a miracle the constable was not hit. He leaped at his man, and Peace fired again. With his left hand he struck at the burglar, knocking down the pistol hand with his right. There was a fifth shot: this time it took effect, passing through the policeman's arm. Nevertheless he would not release his grip of his prisoner, and flung him to the earth. The policeman doubled up his arm, gripped the revolver, still strapped to the burglar's wrist, and struck him on the head with the weapon. Then, turning him face down, he held him till assistance came.

Peace was in a fury. He spat venom at his captor, but presently consented to go quietly, and, escorted by three officers, including the wounded man, trotted down Blackheath Hill with his captors.

Carton had heard the shots and had leaped out of bed. One, two, three, he counted, then a fourth, and a fifth, and no more. He was terrified, but he must know the truth. Drawing on his clothes and shoes, he raced out of the house on to the moonlit wilderness of the heath.

If it was Peace! He ran on, breathing strenuously towards St. John's Park, and arrived as the prisoner

and the three officers came out through the gate. He saw half-clad servants following at a distance and learned the truth.

"An ugly little man. He looked like a nigger. . . . Shot a policeman."

"Dead?" gasped Carton.

"No, he's only wounded. Come along, I'll show you the blood on the grass."

People always seemed to be showing Carton blood on the grass, blood that Peace had shed. He declined the invitation.

Returning to his house, he dressed more completely and walked down to Blackheath Hill, hoping to find an officer he knew. It happened that a friend of his was on duty at the desk, and showed him, with some pride, the revolver with the strap attached. He recognised it instantly as Peace's pistol.

"Would you like to see him?" asked the sergeant. "The inspector has gone up to the house, and if you promise not to let on I'll give you a squint at him."

He took a key and opened a heavy door, and Carton found himself on familiar ground: the corridor of the cells. Stopping before one of the closed doors, the sergeant moved a peep-hole aside and beckoned his companion.

At first the shaking man hardly dared look. At last he summoned up his courage and put his eyes to the observation hole. A man lay on the hard plank, a thin blanket over his legs. There was no doubt about his identity—it was Peace, and he was sleeping as calmly as if he were in his own bed. That in spite of the wounds which lay under the heavy bandages about his head.

Carton tiptoed out into the charge room.

"Never let on I showed him," said the sergeant again. "He's a tough customer. Thank God there are not many like him!"

"What is his name?"

"Ward—that's the name he gave. Usually they are Smiths, but this one's Ward. Ever seen him before?"

It was on the tip of the man's tongue to tell the truth, but such was the terror that Peace inspired that the words would not come. He'd get a long stretch for burglary and would be out of the way for years. Shooting a copper, too—that was serious. Better he went down for that than for the Banner Cross job. Carton might be dragged into that—you never knew what lies Peace would tell.

"Ever seen him before?" asked the sergeant.

"No," said Carton.

He went back to his house, treading on air; up the steep hill, across the heath he swaggered. Going into the kitchen he brewed himself a cup of tea, found notepaper and envelopes and wrote to his young lady.

"Meet me at the usual place on Sunday," ran the letter. "The gentleman I spoke about that I didn't want to see me because he wanted me to marry his daughter, which I would never do, because you're the only true love of my life, has gone away for good."

There were five pages more, one of which was entirely covered with crosses. Carton was nearing fifty, had been the inmate of several prisons, had narrowly escaped penal servitude, but his sentiment endured; and anyway, crosses are almost a relaxation to draw.

CHAPTER XXXV

PEACE woke in the morning, blinked round the cell and swung his feet to the ground. John Ward—that was his name. No address. If they wanted to find out where he lived, let 'em find out. That was what they were paid for.

The gaoler brought him in coffee and bread and butter.

" I'm entitled to two ounces of bacon," said Peace, " and I want my rights "

" You've been in before, have you ? "

' That's nothing to do with you. I'm entitled to two ounces of bacon——"

" A prisoner on remand is entitled to a little extra," said the gaoler patiently. " But you're not on remand. You'd better wait till to-morrow ; you'll be on remand then all right, and you'll be eating government food for a good many years, you old so-and-so."

Peace scowled at him.

" As a bird is known by his note, so is a man by his conversation," he said reproachfully.

The gaoler's reply was unprintable.

The prisoner sipped the weak coffee, munched at the bread and butter and calmly surveyed the situation. There was a solicitor he had consulted in reference to the cottage property. He must communicate with him without delay. Hannah must know and Mrs. Thompson, who had enough money to last her for a few months, must surrender a little—all of it if necessary.

Shooting with intent to murder—that was the charge. He might get a seven for that, or perhaps less. It depended on the judge. He hoped this man Hawkins wouldn't try him. Hawkins' reputation ran through the gaols of England. He was inhuman, without even the lesser bowels of compassion. Men like Hawkins made criminals; every criminal agreed on this. He had a dog in court, which he kept under his feet all through a trial, which in itself was unlawful. How could judges expect poor, hard-working people to keep the law if they broke it themselves?

He wrote a note to his solicitor and got it sent off by police messenger; later he made a brief appearance before a magistrate and was remanded.

There was a lot of interest in the case. The court was crowded, more crowded than it had ever been before when he had made an appearance at the bar of justice. He was an important man. How much more important would it be if they knew they had got Charles Peace! But Sheffield was far away, over a hundred and fifty miles. That would have stirred them up a bit—Charles Peace in court! Instead of which he was John Ward, and if he was fullied he'd probably get seven years at the most—five, perhaps—and then he could be ill and be released on ticket.

There was nobody in the police court who recognised him. They hardly would: he was a master of disguises. . . . He wondered if Jane Garden would know him. Then he remembered that she had seen and identified him at Brighton. It must have been the girl: that doctor hadn't brains enough to see something under his nose.

Alan Mainford put down the London newspaper he was reading.

"John Ward!" he said. "That name sounds a little familiar."

Jane Mainford looked round from the chrysanthemums she was arranging.

"Who is John Ward, and what has he been doing?"

"He's been shooting a policeman."

She shivered.

"How dreadful! In Sheffield?"

He saw the look of anxiety in her eyes and laughed.

"No, it's in London. You were thinking of Mr. Peace."

He looked up at the ceiling with a perplexed frown.

"I seem to have an idea at the back of my mind that he did call himself Ward at one time. I must ask Baldy when I see him."

"Have they arrested him?" she asked.

"Yes, he was charged on remand yesterday morning at Greenwich. He seems to be a particularly ferocious kind of fellow; in many ways the description tallies with Peace, except that they say this man is half a negro."

She looked at him open-mouthed.

"Half a negro? That's how he was when I saw him at Brighton. His face was so dark when I saw him in full light that I wouldn't have recognised him. It was only because I saw him in profile as the carriage was overtaking him that I knew him."

Alan considered the possibilities.

"Rubbish! It isn't he. I'll never be surprised if the little devil comes back to Sheffield."

"Oh, don't!" she begged, and he was all penitence.

She was very quiet for the rest of the day. In the evening, when they were sitting together, she said:

"I'd like to be absolutely sure. He's so much on

my mind, Alan. I wake up in the night sometimes, terrified!"

"Peace? Do you mean the man who has been arrested at Blackheath? Well, that is very easily settled. The trial comes on next week. I'll go down to London and see him at the Old Bailey. I know the Associate there."

"I wish you would," she said. "I have a very special reason for not wishing to dream about ugly people."

"That isn't a reason, that's a superstition," he laughed. "But I'll set your mind at ease. I'll see if I can get old Baldy to go down with me."

He looked at his watch, and at that moment there was a knock at the outer door. He was like clockwork, that man. Baldy was very cheerful: he had obtained a committal against a gang of coiners that day, and he was very cock-a-hoop.

"They'll go before Mr. Justice What's-his-name, and that means we shan't see 'em for a long time," he said.

"Do you know Ward—John Ward?"

Baldy knew several.

"There's a John Ward who kept that what-do-you-call-it public-house on the Eccleshall Road. There's another John Ward whose father was manager for What's their name?"

"I'm talking about a criminal."

Baldy mused on this.

"I've got an idea I've heard it before," he said. And then he slapped his knee. "It's one of the names that Peace used," he said, and husband and wife exchanged glances.

"Read this."

Alan handed him the newspaper. Baldy, adjusting his newly purchased glasses, read slowly to the finish.

"That's not Peace," he said. "He never looked like a negro. If they'd said 'just ugly' it might have been he."

"Mrs. Mainford saw him at Brighton. She said he had a dark skin then."

Baldy shook his head.

"No, he's abroad, in Switzerland. Didn't he send me a postcard with an insulting message on it, addressed to 'Baldy, Sheffield Police Force'?"

"Somebody else may have posted it."

"That's impossible," said Sergeant Eltham. "There was a picture of the Alps on it."

"You can even buy those in London."

But the sergeant took the very confident view that Peace had left England by the machinations of some wealthy friend, and that he might no longer be regarded as an active factor in criminal circles.

"Bless your life, Peace has any number of imitators! There was a feller down at Northampton who did everything that Peace did, including disguising himself. There was that man, What's-his-name, at Bristol—the feller who got ten years—you might have sworn he was Peace. They're imitators; they've got no brains."

"I'm going down to London to the trial to make sure, and I'd like you to come along with me."

Baldy, however, did not like London, and excused himself. It was too noisy a place, and he had a personal feud with Scotland Yard over the question of a police reward which had been denied him and wrongly credited to a member of the London detective force.

"If Scotland Yard says he's Peace, you can be

sure he's not. If they say he's not Peace, you can take the coroner's warrant down and pinch him."

"Will this man get a heavy sentence?" asked Jane.

"Ten years to life," said Baldy indifferently. "Shooting a policeman, you know, is not only an offence against the law of the land, but a crime against nature. They ought to hang 'em for it—one of these days they will. By the way, doctor, I've found out who the cottage belongs to—that Swiss woman, Madame Stahm. She put it in the hands of an agent. Peace tried to sell it—did you know that? That fellow!" He shook his head in wonder. "No, we shall never see Peace again. He'll be elected Lord Mayor of Switzerland or something. He'd kid the hair off a baby's head."

CHAPTER XXXVI

HE voiced an opinion which was pretty general. Mr. Peace was preparing for his trial, and the fatal news came to him a week before. It was to be Hawkins! The name did not send shivers down his back, but it aroused him to a pitch of indignation that such men should be appointed to judge and try their fellow creatures.

By judicious inquiry he discovered the great judge's age—a warder procured the fact from the prison library. Peace had marshalled all his reserves: every penny of money had to go to his defence. Hannah was ordered to sell and sell and sell, to collect debts of dubious authenticity, to borrow money. The main point was that he must be saved. His solicitor, at his

own suggestion, briefed a barrister who had just then come into fame.

"Montagu Williams—I don't think I know him," frowned Peace.

He had heard of him at any rate.

His consultation with his lawyer was a memorable one. For a quarter of an hour the speechless barrister sat whilst Peace laid down the system of defence.

"The point you've got to make is this, mister—you've got to say to this judge: 'What? Are you going to send an old man like that to his grave?'—just like that.'" Peace gave an imitation of sorrowful, pleading anguish.

"I'm afraid I can't say it just like that." Mr. Williams's eyes twinkled.

"Well, somehow like that," said Peace. "And another thing is this: if he knows that I'm an old man, he's not going to give me a long stretch. He's going to say: 'Poor old devil! He ain't got long to live, anyway!' Do you see my meaning?"

"I follow your reasoning, yes."

"What you've got to say is this:"—again Peace grew dramatic and declamatory—"'My Lord, you see before you an old man of sixty-seven, tottering on the verge of the grave'—rub that in! 'He's got no time to live, my Lord and gentlemen of the jury, so why pass a terrible sentence on him? Why not give him a year? He's penitent. I give you my word, gentlemen of the jury, he'll go straight.'"

"That, I'm afraid, I'm not allowed to do," said Mr. Williams. "Sixty-seven. Are you sixty-seven?"

"Sixty-eight," said Peace.

He was then approaching his forty-fifth birthday.

"That's the point you've got to make—about me

age. Get me a short sentence. What's the good of 'em giving me ten years? I shouldn't live to serve it. Do you see what I mean? You know what Hawkins is—you might touch his heart."

"That's all very well," said counsel, "but what age was the policeman you fired at? Was he so old that it didn't matter if he died or not?"

Peace made an impatient "tchk!"

"You're not on his side, are you? You're on my side. Never mind about the policeman—he's alive and well. I could have killed him seven times over. I'm one of the best shots in the land. But did I? No. When I shot him it was done by accident. He pushed my hand and the pistol went off. Didn't he admit it with his own mouth that he hit me on the head with my own hand and my own pistol?"

Counsel left the consultation room not very considerably assisted. He had tried his best to bring home to Peace the seriousness of the crime. Peace had harped upon the desirability of a light sentence.

"Never mind whether I'm sixty-eight or not. I'll look ninety when I get into the box."

He tried to dodge the sessions and find a lighter judge; was found in a fit, foaming at the mouth, in his cell. This was a day or two before the trial. The unimaginative prison doctor tested the foam and found it was soap.

"It's the first time he's ever used it for any purpose," said the chief warder unkindly.

Peace came feebly into the dock of the old Bailey, gazed pathetically at the judge, and was allowed a chair. If he did not look ninety, he looked the years that appeared upon the bill of indictment. His pathetic survey embraced the jury; he looked at them with a

dog-like pleading in his eye, and shook his head slightly, as a beggar shakes his head when he is appealing for charity.

"I have never seen such a lousy, uneducated lot in my life," he said to the warder on his left when he sat down. "There's not one of them that can sign his own name, I'll lay!"

His comments on the judge were unprintable in the columns of a family journal. So that was Hawkins—granite-faced, hard-eyed, iron-lipped! What a dog! What an unfeeling hound of a man! It was going to take the mouthpiece all his time to get him off with three. Not less than five, that lawyer said, maybe seven. It'd be an outrage to send an old man of sixty-seven to quod for seven years. He wondered how judges slept in their beds at night, inflicting suffering and pain on their fellow-creatures.

"It's hard to believe, mate," he said *sotto voce* to the warder, indicating with a nod of his head the great judge, "that him and me was produced by the same Maker."

"I expect he thinks so too," said the warder.

"You're all as bad as one another," growled Peace, folded his arms and appeared to fall asleep.

Now and again, when a police witness was giving testimony as to what happened that night on Blackheath, he opened his eyes, shook his head and murmured: "Lies! All lies! They can't speak the truth!" Once his counsel had to rebuke him sharply.

He was not too pleased with Mr. Montagu Williams. He didn't seem to be enough on his side, and when it came to the speech for the defence, what a defence it was! He could have done better himself. Messing about with all sorts of fancy ideas instead of getting

down to the point that you oughtn't to give a man of sixty-seven a long sentence.

No wonder the jury came back so quickly with its verdict. And yet, did he expect any other than the verdict of "Guilty?" It was hardly likely; but he was a magnificent actor. At the word "Guilty" he staggered, looked, bewildered, from face to face, stepped forward, broken in voice and attitude.

"I haven't been fairly dealt with," he sobbed. "I declare before God that I never had the intention to kill him. All I meant to do was to frighten him, so I could get away. If I'd wanted to kill him I could have done it, but I never did. I really didn't know the pistol was loaded. I hope, my lord, you'll have mercy on me. I feel that I'm that base and bad that I'm neither fit to live nor die. For I've disgraced myself, for I have disgraced my friends." His voice quavered, "I'm not fit to live among mankind. I'm not fit to meet my God. So, oh, my lord, I know I'm base and bad to the uttermost, but I know, at the same time, they have painted my case blacker than what it really is. I hope you will take all this into consideration and not pass upon me a sentence of imprisonment which will be the means of causing me to die in prison, where it is very possible I shall not have a chance amongst my associates to prepare myself to meet my God, that I hope I shall meet. So, my lord, do have mercy upon me!" he wailed, wringing his hands over the edge of the dock at the imperturbable man whose mask of a face never changed. "I beseech you, give me a chance, my lord, to regain my freedom and you shall not, with the help of my God, have any cause to repent passing a merciful sentence upon me. Oh, my lord, you yourself do expect mercy from the hands

of your great and merciful God. Oh, my lord, do have mercy upon me, a most wretched miserable man, a man that am not fit to die. I am not fit to live; but with the help of my God I will try to become a good man. I will try to become a man that will be able in the last day to meet my God, my Great Judge, to meet Him and to receive the great reward at His hands for my true repentance. So, oh, my lord, have mercy upon me, I pray and beseech you. I will say no more; but oh, my lord, have mercy upon me; my lord, have mercy upon me!"[1]

The judge moved, rested his arms on the desk before him, his cold eyes fixed on Peace. Briefly, mercilessly, he sketched the character of the man before him. He saw the soul of Peace, naked. Not three years, not five years . . .

"Notwithstanding your age, therefore, I feel I should fail in my duty to the public if I did not pass upon you the extreme sentence of the law for the offence of which you have been convicted, which is that you be sent to penal servitude for the rest of your natural life."

Peace accepted the sentence more calmly than he had taken the verdict. He had shot his last bolt; he could do no more. Natural life! That meant natural life—all the days of his living in prison; no hope of release. It was final—final for all except for Peace.

"There ain't such a sentence," he told the warder on his way to Pentonville. "It's against the law, and I'm sending a letter to Our Gracious Majesty about it."

There was a merciful release for him at hand. As

[1] This is an actual verbatim report of that extraordinary outburst from the dock, the most superb piece of acting that has ever been seen in a criminal court

he paraded round the swing on his first morning in Pentonville, he saw a group of police officers and civilians in the centre. Two men walked out, and somebody called him by name, "Ward!" and urged him into the centre of the ring. He came face to face with Alan.

"Do you know this gentleman?" asked somebody.

"Yes," said Peace boldly; "he's the man who tried to poison my wife by giving her arsenic in her beer."

Only the solemnity of the moment checked Alan's laugh.

"Do you know him, doctor?"

"Yes. His name is Charles Peace."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THAT day Hannah, his wife, was privileged to see him at Pentonville. She had not had the opportunity before he was removed from Newgate. He saw her in the usual office, spoke a few commonplaces, of the necessity of raising further money. No king levied tribute upon his subjects more ruthlessly than Peace upon his family When she was going:

"Here," he called, "send a telegraph message to Mrs. Mainford."

He gave her the address and made her repeat it.

"'Mrs. Dr. Mainford.' Send this telegram the moment you get outside the prison, or I'll never forgive you. This is what you say: 'Deepest sorrow to tell you your husband, Dr. Mainford, was run over in the street to-day and is dead.'"

"Is he?" asked Hannah.

"Never mind about 'is he'!" snarled Peace. "Can you remember that—the address? Send it. Maybe she's going to have a baby."

The telegram never reached Jane, partly because an official of the prison stopped the woman in the lobby and terrified her into promising that such a message should not be sent, and partly because Hannah could never have remembered it; and if she had remembered it she couldn't have sent it, for she could neither read nor write.

Whether she sent it or not was a matter of indifference to Peace, who knew as well as anybody the limitations of her intellectual equipment. He had the satisfaction of devising the shock. There was a certain relief in being Charles Peace again, the famous Charles Peace, the Charles Peace that everybody was talking about and writing about and thinking about. How they'd talk in Sheffield! They'd come from miles to see him. There'd be crowds at the station; they'd have to get the soldiers to keep the court cleared. He wished they had an Assize Court in Sheffield: it robbed him of some of his glory to be transferred to Leeds. Who would be there?

He procured a copy of the inquest proceedings and re-read it carefully.

Kate Dyson—she was in America. Would they bring her back? That would cost a lot of money—hundreds of pounds. Fancy spending hundreds of pounds to bring that (whatever she was) from America! It was wasting the public money. In such matters he was a rigid economist.

Carton! He bared his gums at the name. If that man came into court he'd jump over the dock and

strangle him. They'd never pry his fingers loose from the traitor's throat. He was pretty strong ; he always was powerful in the arm. That would be a sensation if you liked—Charlie Peace strangling a man in court in front of judges and juries and everything.

He knew now the part that Carton had played in trapping him. It wasn't his house at all. His solicitor had asked at the preliminary police court proceedings if there was such a man working for the owner of the house, and had been told " No." By various methods Peace came to learn who his actual employer was. He had sold him, horn, hide and hoof, to the enemy. A man he had befriended, looked after. He went back in his mind to recall the services he had rendered the traitor, but could remember no more than that he had paid his fare from Manchester to Sheffield—or was it half the fare ? Anyway, he had helped him.

He could bring Carton into the case, perhaps get him put in the dock with him. He consulted his London solicitors about this, but they shook their heads.

" He has never been mentioned. He could not be arrested on your word."

" Why not ? " asked Peace indignantly.

The solicitors were tired of arguing with him.

He passed hours planning vengeance on the ex-butler, and in the face of his shocking perverseness could find excuses for Alan Mainford. After all, Alan Mainford was a gentleman bred and born, whilst Carton was just a (whatever he was).

He spent quite a lot of time in a voluminous correspondence with the Home Office, demanding that certain photographs which he had kept as a pleasant souvenir of his association with Mrs. Dyson, and which had been taken from him at Blackheath Road station,

should be restored to him. There were letters, too, if they could be called such; notes she had written to him, all rather cryptic, all having a peculiar significance which, he asserted and she was to deny a little unconvincingly, was discreditable to her honourable name.

Mrs. Dyson was enjoying the dignity and honour of a cataclysmic widowhood. She must be brought down to her place. The notes would prove it; the photographs might prove it. Face to face with justice, she might, under pressure, volunteer to prove it.

"The beginning and end of the argument," said his solicitor, "being that if he could prove that she and he had a love affair, then the murder of her husband was the merest trifle."

They did not like Peace at Pentonville. In every sense he was a nasty man, crude, undisciplined, lacking even the rough polish of civilisation. He confounded fear with disgust, and preened himself upon his importance.

He wrote a letter to Alan (the spelling has been rectified):

"DEAR SIR,—I am that wretched and unhappy man, Charles Peace or John Ward, who you know, and which had never done wrong to you but always spoken highly of your merits. Dear Sir, you and your dear wife, who I love as my own child because she's so dear and true as any woman can be, which you're lucky to get her, as I have always said, you know I am under misfortune, that my very life is being sworn away by people who are jealous of me though I've never done anything and am a poor old man of sixty-eight with one foot in the grave, they still persecute me for righteousness' sake, as it is written in the Bible. So I ask all my friends

to rally round me especially those who are not my friends but will take pity upon my helpless state knowing that some day an account will be rendered of them according to their works. Dear Sir and Doctor, be kind, let your noble heart speak, forgive bygones and suchlike misunderstandings. Your word would go a long way to the judge and the gentlemen of the jury (so called) if you could speak for me or send me a few pounds, my wife is starving, I have given her everything I have and she is being hounded by the police as you well know they do if they've got a down on anybody which they have for it's Charles Peace this and Charles Peace that, and never taking the trouble to find out if I did it. Dear Sir Alan Mainford, life is short and time is on the wing, and no man knows what to-morrow bringeth forth, no not one, and if we help our enemies then, dear sir, there is a heavenly crown for us, but if we spit upon our enemies bad luck will follow us hither we go and whither. A few shillings will not hurt you, but especially if you can come and say a few words about how I've always been the first to help others. Oh, dear sir, perhaps you will have a son of your own, please God you may, and what will happen to him, says you, if he's in the same position as Charles Peace (John Ward) ? Oh, how terrible that would be for his mother ! So do help, for many can help one but one cannot help many.

" Your obedient servant,
" CHARLES PEACE,
" JOHN WARD "

" Do you know," said Alan, " I'm inclined to send the drivelling old devil a ten-pound note ? "

" He'd hate you if you sent ten. He'll not forgive

you if it isn't a hundred," said Jane quietly, and it was a pretty accurate diagnosis.

A great weight had been lifted from her mind when the identity was established. On his return Alan told her of the message Peace had dictated—the prison authorities had got into touch with him immediately, in case he wanted to prepare his wife. She was not shocked but a little sad.

"Isn't there something in him, some brilliant mind-atom, that might have placed him among the great geniuses of the world? Even in his vileness there is an odd novelty which in a perverse way is charming."

"I'm glad you see it like that," said Alan, astounded.

He saw it like that himself a day or two later, when he heard some private gossip about Peace. Peace had learned that Carton was leaving his employer and was opening a fish shop on Blackheath Hill. The news drove him into paroxysms of jealous fury. From his point of view it was the act of an upstart, venturing into the kingdom reserved for greater men with greater minds. Always to Peace the shopkeeper was the aristocrat of the lower classes. He thought of no finish to the most magnificent of his dreams but that it would end in a magnificent store of which he would be the proprietor. A patron of pretty shop girls, with a new kind of shutters that rolled down and rolled up. He would come to business every morning in a small brougham, drawn by two proud and high-stepping horses. If he ever made any wonderful promise to any woman of his acquaintance, the culminating and crowning argument was that she should be set up in business with a shop of her own.

Carton in a fried fish shop, and married to that young girl in magenta silk! Carton living away from his

place of business, in three rooms with the use of the kitchen! It was not to be endured. He spent time that he might have given to his defence, writing a letter to Carton, so vile in tone and expression that it never got beyond the office of the prison censor. . . .

Here he was on his way to Sheffield, wearing convict garb, handcuffs on his wrists; a warder beside him, one in front of him, blinds drawn at every station and let up after the train steamed out. A whole compartment to himself. For many reasons it was not a pleasant journey for the warders.

Pollard, the rising man at the Treasury, was sent down to prosecute. The defence was hastily organised by the shrewdest of local solicitors, who was neither in awe of Pollard nor abashed by the immense character of his task. Whatever discouragement there was, was supplied by the prisoner.

Peace was in his most truculent and arrogant mood. His reception had fizzled out, owing to the earliness of his arrival. It was not even necessary to have soldiers to keep people out of the court, which was, however, uncomfortably crowded. There were no familiar faces to be seen as yet—yes, there was: he saw a veiled woman.

"You wouldn't think she'd have the face to come here," he said to the warder at his side; "the sauce of it!"

They'd brought her all across the Atlantic Ocean, thousand and thousands of miles, from Cleveland, Ohio! She'd better have stayed away There was a showing up coming for her, if she only knew it. Modesty? She didn't know the meaning of the word. If he was her he'd run a thousand miles rather than stand up in that box and hear the things that she was

going to hear, if his solicitor did his duty. He rather suspected all solicitors and counsel: they were too friendly with one another. He had seen the prosecuting counsel and the defending counsel shake hands at the Old Bailey. That wasn't right. They had probably made it up before they came into court, what they were going to say. A nice state of affairs!

There was Baldy, leaning with his back to the wall of the court, eyeing him with a benevolence which would not have been out of place in a rose grower showing a championship exhibit. That's what he was! Charles Peace, the champion of Sheffield.

Peace could never interpret, though he received unerring reactions. He could not put into words Baldy's attitude of mind, but he knew the effect that attitude produced in itself, and could express it.

Who else? The doctor wasn't here, but there was a bench of magistrates, with a stipendiary in the middle. He didn't bother much about this stipendiary; by all accounts there wasn't a great deal to him.

The stipendiary was inclined to have preconceived notions. He was obviously anxious to shift the case from his own court to a superior tribunal. He started by being a little in awe of the Treasury counsel, and ended by being respectful to the solicitor for the defence. He was neither strong nor weak, good nor bad: he was adequate for the occasion. Peace was held on a coroner's warrant, and it was not absolutely necessary that he should come into the magistrate's court at all.

The doctor was not here: Peace made sure of that. Nor the nuss—nor Carton. Carton ought to be sitting up here, and so ought her ladyship, Madame Stahm, and that long-faced foreigner. He wished they'd let

him have his fiddle in prison. He wondered, if he asked the magistrate, whether he could get it. But no, that would disturb the other prisoners. Being tried for his life, he ought to have just what he wanted. That was the law.

He listened while his lawyer pleaded for an adjournment, battling with the Treasury counsel, and, if the truth be told, with the stipendiary too. The case was shockingly presented; no amateur could have done worse than the Treasury. The rules of evidence were flagrantly ignored. The magistrate allowed reference to previous charges to be made—the very presence of Peace in the dock, wearing convict's uniform, would have been sufficient, if he had been tried fifty years later, to quash the trial.

There was something farcical about it. Everybody knew he was guilty, and wanted to get to the point where someone in authority would say so. They resented as a waste of time taking any point that might properly be offered in the man's defence. Peace was a little deaf—whether naturally so or conveniently does not matter. He interrupted occasionally, but, generally speaking, his attitude towards the first witnesses was one of indifference. It was when the veiled woman went into the box that he sat up.

Let her show her face, not hide herself so that nobody could tell what she was saying and what she meant. He whispered excitedly to his solicitor, pleaded and gibbered.

Would the lady remove her veil? The lady removed her veil. Peace shook his head. No, she wasn't what she had been. Put her beside Thompson, and what was she? Put her beside that nuss, and she was just a common drab. He felt very superior to her; he had

never felt so superior before. He was fighting for his life. As for Mrs. Dyson, who had come all these thousands of miles to testify against him, she was fighting for her reputation, which was much more precious to her than anybody's life.

She was very emphatic where she could be, very evasive where she had to be; glossed over extremely awkward questions with a complete loss of memory. Peace her lover? The idea was absurd. She had always looked upon him as rather a vulgar little man, not to be compared with her husband, who was a gentleman in every sense of the word.

There was a wrangle between bench and advocate on the production of letters. The stipendiary, with one eye upon the Treasury, would have none of them. That dogged solicitor would not be denied. He was persistent, unimpressed by this particular majesty of law, thrusting spear-points of logic towards a vacillating bench, which burst a few bubbles and ruffled a few tempers. In the end he had his way.

There were the letters written, said Peace, by the woman to him; appointments made, assignations arranged. She had never written the letters; they were forgeries. Her attitude seemed to say: "Here is a man charged with murder. Why shouldn't he also commit forgery? How can you doubt me, who have never been charged with murder? Forgeries, all of them!"

That she was lying, nobody doubted. That between these two people there had been criminal knowledge, the most callow or the most charitable must believe. The Treasury believed it. Mr. Pollard was a little pompous; in a wearisome way, majestic. There had been an earlier passage of arms between him and Peace,

and once, when the prisoner interrupted, the Treasury counsel rose in his might and became the legal pedant, explaining to the justices just what they could do. They seemed to know.

Peace went back to London, depressed. The dice were loaded against him ; he was not having a fair deal. He hadn't a chance. He told the warders this. The warders agreed.

"Anything to keep the little beast in an amiable mood."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

He was remanded to Pentonville, for he was still in the custody of the governor of that prison, and would remain so until he was committed to another gaol.

In the intervening period he conceived a great idea. That he should be hanged was little matter. To be buried in gaol—that was an ugly end to a man of affairs. He questioned the chief warder about it. What happened to a man who died in prison? Did his relations have his body?

"Certainly they do," said the chief warder.

"But suppose a man is being tried for murder, and he dies before he's sentenced, do his relations have his body?"

There was a point of law raised here. Offhand, the warder thought they would have the right to claim all that was mortal of him and dispose of it reverently and decently, until the judge uttered the fateful words: "And your body shall afterwards be buried in the prison in which you were last confined."

The fleshly part of him was a responsibility for his relations. Peace split hairs.

"Suppose a man died just before the judge came *to that bit—eh? That's a tickler for you! I'll bet nobody's ever thought of that before.*"

He grew quite animated.

"I've set posers to judges that they couldn't answer. And lawyers—I've got 'em all tied up! Just ask your bloke what he thinks of that."

He was very pleased with himself, that he had set a difficult case. He had forgotten the matter the next morning, having made definite plans for the disposal of his own body. There would be an inquest at the Duke of York, and a quiet, mournful procession to the cemetery. Spectators would take off their hats as it passed, and drop a silent tear. Mothers would bring their children and say: "There goes Charlie Peace. You remember that, my boy, when you grow up."

To have the cause of your death and the state of your mind amicably settled over a pot of ale—that seemed a very attractive proposition. Peace considered the matter from every angle and found it good.

The whining coward in him was too apparent to be true. It belonged to the pageantry of his misfortune, was never revealed, except publicly and within the hearing of reporters. He was too much without fear to be as contemptible as he seemed to be; his whining, his sycophancy, his nauseating supplications were all parts appropriate to the rôles he played. Largely they were as mechanical as the beggar's whine or the milkman's howl.

A five-pound note came to him from Sheffield. Alan Mainford made no attempt to disguise the fact that he was the donor, for though he sent no letter, the

money was enclosed in a sheet of his notepaper. Peace shed tears and wrote an incoherent letter of thanks. To his wife he also wrote :

" *If you can get up to see this man Mainford, he's a doctor, and you pitch it strong, you might get £50 out of him. Dear wife, if anything happens to me, you go on writing to him about every three months. Remember, dear wife, that the rich must help the poor. Did you sell my violin and have you got the money I told you about ? Dear wife, ask Mrs. Thompson to see her husband and get some money. And, dear wife, don't go gossiping about my business. I'm not dead yet.*"

He put a P.S. to this letter :

" Don't send the money until you hear I'm fullied." [1]

He had reason for this warning. On the morning of the 22nd of January, with handcuffs on his wrists, he was taken from Pentonville Gaol by cab and hurried into a third-class carriage on the milk train, the earliest train. He gave more than ordinary trouble on the journey, exasperating his custodians to the last point of endurance.

Just before the train reached Darnall he asked to have the window down. The warders were not averse. Apparently he had been grumbling, but had quietened down. Their attention was distracted for the briefest space of time, and Peace seized the opportunity. Like a cat he leaped for the narrow opening of the window. The warders spun round just in time to catch

[1] Fully committed for trial.

him by the ankle. They held him as long as they could, pulling frantically at the communication cord.

The man leaning out of the window strove desperately to get a firmer grip. Peace was lying head downwards, flying rather, spreadeagled away from the train. And then the warders' grip loosened and he fell by the side of the line, turning over and over. They got the train stopped at last and the warders flew back along the rails to where the inert figure lay. That he was dead, neither doubted. One may suppose they were a little relieved, whatever reprimand might come to them.

Peace lay in the snow, unconscious, bleeding from the head. One of his ribs was broken. A slow local train came to a standstill behind the express; they lifted him into the guards' van and covered him with rugs. He missed the big crowd that was waiting for his reappearance; they waited in vain. He lay in a cell, moaning, weeping and cursing. He cursed very hard.

He gave Sheffield another sensation, which brought the stipendiary, his brother magistrates and the Treasury counsel a considerable amount of discomfort. It produced a macabre setting for the second hearing that was in the atmosphere of the crime and the criminal.

No more would he sit in the dock, noisily protesting against reporters sketching his picture. He knew his rights there, could frustrate the *lèse majesté* which expedient journalism practised. Now he came to his own. Enfeebled with age and debility, doubly underlined by the eerie setting of his own misfortune. Dosed with milk and brandy, he appeared to sleep through the night, but denied that he had as much as closed his eyes in slumber.

They brought him out of his cell the next morning for the second hearing. The court was the corridor before his cell at Water Lane Police Station. Candles were lit to illuminate the gloom. The lighting and the composition of the picture was a subject for Hogarth, the central figure being a man swathed in blankets, huddled up in a chair, who said he wished he was dead, and at times appeared to be dying, but was never far from his arrogant self.

"Please don't put your feet on my table," said the stipendiary plaintively.

Here they played out the second scene of the first act, with Mrs. Dyson present to deny, to forget and sometimes to affirm with too great heartiness. Some events she could remember to the day, the hour, the minute; other events which, if they had developed, must be discreditable to herself, she could not recall within a year or two, if she could recall them at all.

There was the usual passage between the cold and shivering stipendiary and the razor-sharp solicitor for the defence. Always in the end the stipendiary leaned back in his chair and looked helplessly for sympathy from his colleagues, very few of whom knew what it was all about.

Peace was for calling witnesses then and there. They were prepared to be called. He cared nothing for the routine of preliminary examinations. He wanted justice—that was all he wanted—and he was very cold; he wanted to sit before a fire and take the chill out of himself.

They committed him to take his trial and put him back into the cell. He went, groaning. A few minutes later he called in his solicitor and offered emphatic views about the line his defence should take. He had a

retinue that a distinguished person might envy when they removed him to Armley Gaol by easy stages. The prison van must move slowly; he must have a soft mattress beneath him.

That night there were two happy men in Sheffield: a chief warder and a warder from Pentonville Prison, who went back to London alone.

"Thank God they won't hang him in London!" said one, and the other may or may not have said: "Amen!"

"I saw him before he went away," said Baldy. "I don't know whether he's hurt or whether he's acting. In my opinion you couldn't hurt him. You remember Carton? Peace says that it was he who fired the shot and he shielded him. He told me a rigmarole story about some crystals that Carton was trying to get for a foreign woman, and he's given me a long list of burglaries that he has committed. By 'he' I mean Carton.

"He said Carton put him up to abducting your lady——"

"By 'he' you mean Peace."

"I gather he doesn't like Carton. He'll have some difficulty in bringing him into it."

"That's what I say," said Baldy. "Carton isn't a Sheffield man anyway, and you wouldn't kill a rat on Peace's evidence."

Alan leaned back in his chair.

"I don't know. I suppose it's all right. The man's a murderer, a most unscrupulous little beast, but, of course, he won't get a fair trial. The jury will go into the box with the express intention of hanging him; they'll know every detail of his career; and when the judge asks them to disabuse their minds of what

they've heard before, he might as well be asking them to forget that they've a pain in the stomach, if they have one. The only evidence against the man is Mrs. Dyson's. There's nobody else. And Mrs. Dyson is admittedly a—well, a prevaricator. Any lawyer could prove that. She's another on whose evidence you wouldn't hang a rabbit ! "

Baldy listened in amazement.

" If ever a man deserved death——" he began.

" Yes, yes, I know," nodded Alan. " And if ever a bottle deserved to be kicked into oblivion as a public nuisance, it is one filled with asafœtida. It was designed to hold whatever was put into it—an Eastern scent, rare wine, slime from a stagnant pool. Have you ever thought what might have happened to Peace if somebody had taken him by the ear and led him out of the circumstances where he looked after the animals, and sent him to a school, put him in a dentist's chair and saw to his teeth, whacked him when he didn't clean his hands, and gradually instilled into him the healthy education that I had ? Do you realise what he would have been ? "

That was indeed a little beyond Baldy, who was accustomed to dealing with facts and stark realities.

" There it is," said Alan. " He'll go up before a judge, posture and whine, strike attitudes, and the end of it all will be that he will hang by the neck until he's dead, and that will be the last of him. Nothing can save him. There's no doubt, no mercy, no hope. But you couldn't convict him, strictly on the evidence. It's his word against Mrs. Dyson's—that and no more. The other evidence hardly counts. And who can believe her ? Who would believe her on the facts as stated ? And they do not require more than superficial

examination. Yet on her word Peace will die—rightly, as it happens; wrongly from the strict point of view of equity."

Alan's ears should have burnt. At that very moment Peace was talking to a warder who was attending him.

"There's people I've helped," he groaned. "I've given away hundreds. There's a woman in Switzerland that owes me two thousand—a foreigner. Down in Sheffield there's a doctor called Mainford who wouldn't be anywhere if it wasn't for me. I got him the house he lives in; he wouldn't have known his missus, only I introduced 'em. She used to go down on her knees an' ask me to take her away, but I wouldn't. Nuss Garden she was—a whipper-snapper. But now I'm down she don't know me! That's gratitude, because I'm old and poor and helpless—mind my head, you clumsy lout!"

He wrote letters. Cæsar was no more assiduous in correspondence than Peace. They were weird-looking letters, scrawled, ill-spelt, full of phrases that had neither beginning nor end. Taken as entities, they were objective. Always he required something, and what that something was he never left any doubt in the mind of the person to whom they were addressed.

He wrote to his wife, a letter full of instructions for raising money, and signed himself her affectionate and unhappy husband. Almost by the same post he wrote to his lady friend, the blonde, vivacious Mrs. Thompson, and begged her not to forget the love they had for one another. He signed it "Your ever true lover till death." Was it by accident that he put his own name and followed it with the name he had borne when they lived under the same roof?

CHAPTER XXXIX

LEEDS Assizes opened on the 30th of January, 1879, and the grand jury voted a bill of indictment against Charles Peace, *alias* John Ward, joiner or carver or gilder. They put his age as forty-seven. This saved his counsel from a lot of unnecessary instructions.

Here was Charles Peace, on the last grand lap of his course. A man of tremendous importance, all eyes focused on him.

Carton got a holiday, came up to Leeds with the greatest assurance, secured admission to the court, and at the last moment funked it, not daring to meet the accusing eye of the joiner or carver or gilder, who stood indicted in that he did kill and slay Arthur Dyson by shooting at him with a revolver. He sneaked out of court, and, finding an eating-house, ordered his breakfast, for he had been travelling the greater part of the night. When he attempted to get a place in the public gallery later in the day he was told that the court was full. He was not sorry.

Though the weather was bitterly cold, and powdery snow had fallen, there was an immense crowd about the Town Hall. It was rumoured that Peace would be brought to Armley Gaol under a strong escort of hussars, that an attempt would be made to rescue him. By whom was never suggested. He had no friends; he was no leader of desperate gangs; in all the thousands that filled the court or looked around it, there was not one but was impatient to see the end of the trial come and Peace stand up to take his medicine.

How would he take it ? What would he say ? Would he whine, grovel, as he did at the Old Bailey ? Would he hurl imprecations at the witnesses, defy the judge ? That was the only thing that mattered—the end of it. Not the bald result, but the spectacle it might afford.

Nobody spoke a word for him. There were joking admirers, who knew nothing about him, or had any cause for admiration. He was dead and damned too, if public opinion could control the hereafter.

" If, when I saw him in the yard at Pentonville," said Alan, " I had walked up to him and said ' You are Charles Peace ' and shot him dead, that would have been a logical and praiseworthy disposal of the matter."

Alan snatched a day to witness part of the trial, but did not stay long. It was imperative that he should be within call in Sheffield. He tried to keep the subject from Jane, but she discussed it very calmly.

" He'll die before his time—that is all. There is nothing really tragic in that. The tragedy is his life, but of that he is probably quite unconscious. Don't worry, darling. I'll even read an account of the execution and not be hurt by it."

" I won't test your philosophy," said Alan.

The judge was a new man to Peace—Lopes.

" Never heard of him."

He was better than Hawkins. Anybody was better than Hawkins. Suppose there was a verdict of guilty and they scragged him ? That'd be a smack in the eye for Hawkins, who wanted him to live in prison all his life and die there.

He was more comfortable about his new counsel: a gentleman, every inch of him. The junior counsel was another gentleman. And he didn't mind the Treasury

man, who put the case fairly—up to a point. Of course, it was his job to make it hot for the prisoner: that was what he was paid for. Peace prided himself upon being a sensible man. He didn't put it like that fellow Pollard put it, but he brought up the escape, which had nothing to do with the business. When Lockwood got up and told him off and the judge approved, Peace felt that he was getting his money's worth.

The same old dreary procession of witnesses. He was expecting Mrs. Dyson to be called last. He sat up in the windsor chair, and observed with interest when her name was called early on in the proceedings. There she was, as brazen as ever. She was getting fatter, too. He eyed her critically. Really, it was a wonder the woman wasn't struck dead. And they wouldn't let her be asked questions about the letters; that was an injustice—he boiled at it. Some legal quibble, one of those lawyer tricks. The letters hadn't been handed in, so they couldn't be talked about. Of all the injustices!

He depended on those letters and photographs. Mrs. Dyson was "couldn't remembering" all over again. How she twisted and turned, and how that memory of hers turned blank at a snap of the finger! She couldn't remember when she moved to Darnall. Peace laughed aloud. Nobody took any notice of him. It might have been 1875 or '76 or '74 or '73.

"I cannot tell . . . I cannot tell."

Peace wanted to stand up and shout at her, ask her if she'd been drinking again, if she remembered that night at the Duke of York.

But that Lockwood got over her artfulness. He managed to get the letters in somehow. They were forgeries; she had never seen them. He leaned back

in his chair, looking from one warder to the other, and shook his head in resignation.

Once he was amused; it was when she admitted that she had left a public-house "slightly inebriated." He repeated the words to a warder. Somebody near heard him say "A lady!"

Throughout the trial he was reasonable. Smothered comments on witnesses, a reference to one as a villain. . . . It was over at last—speech for the prosecution, speech for defence. He ceased to be the practical man of affairs. Everything right and proper—inevitable. Part of the speech for the defence pleased him very much. He said "Hear, hear!" very loudly, and was surprised that the applause was not more general.

The charge to the jury. The inevitable and invariable appeal to men who were steeped in every detail of the case to forget that they had ever heard anything about it; to be impartial, which is the eminent quality of Englishmen. Peace listened blankly to the charge, seemingly unmoved.

The jury were out twelve minutes, and they were agreed upon their verdict. The prisoner at the bar was guilty of murder.

Peace stood up, blinking round the court. He was overcome by the grandeur of the moment, and when the Clerk of Arraigns asked him what he would say why the court should not pass sentence according to law, he replied:

"It's no use saying anything."

Which was one of the most intelligent things said in the court that day.

That was all. The black cap on the judge's wig. Where had he seen that before? At the Harbrons' trial, of course. It looked different when you were

looking at it from the public gallery. A little point falls over the front of the wig. The clerk hadn't put it on straight ; it had a rakish angle to it. The judge in his scarlet robes said what it was proper to say. He had had a patient trial ; every argument that could be used in his favour had been used by counsel, to whose superlative genius he paid tribute.

This was the way he, Charles Peace, must go. He was to be taken hence to the place whence he came ; thence he would be taken to the place of execution, and there he would be hanged by the neck until he was dead, and his body would afterwards be buried in the precincts of the gaol wherein he was last confined.

The judge expressed the hope that the Lord would have mercy upon his soul. Somebody said " Amen ! "

Peace stood irresolutely, fumbling at his cap. The warder touched him on the arm. They always did that at every trial. They turned to go to the place whence they came, and thence to a place of execution.

Peace said nothing. What was the use of saying anything ? There was no despair in that remark, just cold intelligence. It meant ever so much more than his supplication before Hawkins, Justice.

A great crowd gathered outside to see his removal to the place whence he came, but they were disappointed. A few people hooted, which seemed a little superfluous. They were hooting Peace because he had been a wicked man and had shot a man who was not so wicked. One man had been shot, the other man was going to be hanged, just to level things up. And Mrs. Dyson would go across the Atlantic to proper oblivion.

Charles Peace was to die, the judge was to die, the

two counsel for the prosecution and the two counsel for the defence, two of them painfully, were all to die, and the only one of them to be remembered was this ugly little blackguard, foul of mind and speech and thought, yet hiding in his toad head a jewel that none could appraise.

On the way to Armley he asked if he could read what the papers said about him on the following morning.

"I don't think you'd better see that," said the warder.

"Why not?" demanded Peace. "They're not going to leave me out altogether, are they?"

You never quite knew where you were with him. Sometimes the soiled rag of his mind lifted like a curtain and gave you a flashing vision of the radiance behind. Then the nasty, soiled thing fell down again, and you saw him materially as he was—a nasty little man.

Quite a number of newspapers glorified the law on the following morning and spoke learnedly of Nemesis and justice. They forgot to mention the fact that he played the fiddle. . . . Nobody seemed to think that was a point in his favour.

So went Charles Peace on the first stage of his last lap, to the place whence he came, and all England was satisfied, and said: "Hanging's too good for him."

As if hanging was too good for anybody.

CHAPTER XL

In the dark of the morning, a policeman patrolling the vicinity of Armley Gaol saw a man slouching slowly along. He passed the policeman, and a quarter of an hour later the officer observed him coming back again and challenged him.

He was a wild-looking man, unshaven, white-faced, sack-eyed. He wore a rough pea jacket, the collar turned up to his ears, and a pot hat. Most remarkable feature of his attire was a pair of kid gloves.

"I've got a friend inside"—he shivered in the cold wind which swept round the corner of the prison—"going to be hung. . . . Charles Peace."

The policeman eyed him with an interest.

"Charles Peace, a friend of yours, eh? Well, what are you doing around here?"

The man shook his head helplessly.

"I can't keep away—that's the trouble," he said. "Went off to London and had to come back. Couldn't sleep . . . thinking of him in the condemned cell. . . . My God, it was awful!"

The policeman thought the matter over, and found an explanation.

"So you thought you'd like to be near him, did you?"

The man nodded quickly.

And then the man behind the constable asserted itself. He had a wife who nagged him all the time for news of Peace. If a policeman did not know, and a policeman, moreover, who had the gaol on his beat, who would?

"Have you been in to see him?" he asked.

The man shook his head.

"No, I haven't been in to see him, and I'm not going. I don't want to see him . . . awful, ain't it—him living there, and he'll be dead in a week!"

"Three clear Sundays," murmured the policeman.

"Awful, awful!" quavered the walker of the night. "I've been here since three. I walk round and round, or as near round as I can get—until I'm ready to drop. He'll be sleeping—yes, he will; you don't know Charles. I see him sleeping the day he was pinched at Blackheath. With my own eyes."

"What's your name?" asked the policeman suspiciously.

"Carton—that's my name. I've got a good job in London, and a young lady, and a business of my own . . . master man. The landlord's done up the shop free of charge. The counter was there. Fried fish . . . and stewed eels. There's a lot of profit in it."

He glanced fearfully up at the walls of the gaol.

"Where's the condemned cell, sir?" he asked. "It'll be in one of the main wards. I suppose? A feller told me the execution place was just about there." He pointed. "I hear a young builder has got the job of putting up the scaffold."

"Don't you worry your head too much about hanging, my boy," said the policeman paternally. "We've all got to come to it sooner or later—I don't mean hanging, I mean passing away. You'll go mad if you think about things like this, it's worse than penny dreadfuls."

The next night he saw the same man and spoke to him. In the meantime he had reported the matter to his superior and had received certain instructions

Carton was told just where he could walk and where his perambulations were forbidden.

"You wasn't at the trial?" said the policeman.

Carton hesitated.

"No," he said; "my body wasn't there, but I was there! My body ain't inside that prison, but I'm there!"

He was looking even more unkempt than he had been when the policeman had seen him before.

"He wouldn't be here at all but for me—it's awful! It can't be worse to have murder on your hands . . . to wake up every morning from your sleep and say: 'There's a man in that condemned cell, waiting to be hung, and I put him there. He's having his breakfast with two warders looking on'; and going to bed every night and saying: 'Well, in three or four nights' time I shan't be going to bed at all'; and waking up every morning and seeing the light come in, and saying: 'I'll only see this about three more times.'—And I did it! That's what you can't understand and nobody else can understand. I didn't like him, and never shall like him, and he didn't like me. But that's nothing—there he is."

He pointed his gloved finger towards the gaol.

"I'll bet he's sleeping. I'll bet he's giving more trouble than any man inside! I'll bet he don't care a half, or a hundredth part, of what I care, or feel anything like I feel!"

The policeman thought over this matter, and reached the conclusion that we all had our troubles to bear. Carton apparently had other troubles, and he mentioned them casually. He had detected his young lady surreptitiously walking out with another man, a young clerk from Penn's Ironworks. And after he'd taken the

shop and had it painted blue, and purchased the apparatus for fish-frying ! A nice thing !

The story of this wanderer of the night came by obvious channels of transmission to the prison officials, and in some mysterious fashion, remembering that all news of the outside world was shut from him, to Peace himself. He derived considerable satisfaction from the knowledge.

" And so he ought to be," he said, referring to the man's misery. " After what I done for him ! Took him in when he hadn't got a friend in the world, and looked after him—and what did he do to me ? He put the police up to me—got 'em to swear my life away. He's more of a murderer than I am, because I didn't intend killing anybody and he did intend doing me in ! "

He had grown a little gloomy, but was not more tractable than he had been. To the warders who watched him day and night he was a source of constant anxiety. They suspected his ingenuity, which might at any time put into his hand a weapon which would enable him to cheat the hangman.

One cause of his depression he revealed to the visiting clergyman.

" People have forgot all about Charles Peace now," he said.

He was conservative, something of a ritualist, and demanded, sometimes with acerbity, all the material and spiritual etceteras to which his position entitled him. The chaplain's visits were part of his rights. He went farther afield and sought the spiritual counsel of a Sheffield pastor to whom he was known. Because he was at heart an actor, and the circus blood in him still tingled, he must have the lines and properties which his setting demanded.

He was not a hypocrite, not even an opportunist. He was, in his crude way, an artist.

One morning he swung his legs out of bed, a light in his dog's eyes, a bright idea working confusedly in his mind.

"You'd better go back to bed," said one of the watchers. "It's only four o'clock."

"I'm going to write," said Peace, and dressed himself.

Write he did with a vengeance; for in the night there had come to him the spectacle of Harbron, working in a convict prison, under a life sentence for a murder he did not commit. Only Peace could know his own mind, but to those who have studied him it was not penitence, not a belated sense of justice, nothing, indeed, but a passion for the grand gesture and the knowledge that his act would set tongues wagging all over the world, which produced his confession.

For confess he did. To the minister who called that day; to the Home Secretary in more elaborate manner, illustrated by sketches of his own design, he told the story of Cock and the shooting.

All the penitent things he should have said he did say, but crowded them into the smallest possible space. His chief interest was to recall details exactly, and here in some respects he failed.

He would have let William Harbron die without compunction. The sufferings of this innocent man never disturbed his mind for a second. The grand gesture produced all he anticipated. The loss to him was that he could not read the newspapers and revel in the new-found sensation.

One sensation remained for him. Three days before the end, an application was made for permission to

visit him. He was consulted, and, on seeing the name of his visitor, grew pleasantly excited.

"It's the woman I was talking to you about," he said exultantly. "All the way from abroad she's come —what did I tell you? They never forget old Charlie Peace."

The interview took place in the room proper for the purpose. Madame Stahm, in her stiff silk, sat at one end of the table, the bearded little convict at the other. She was very bright, beautifully human.

"I have come all the way from Switzerland to see you, my little friend. I heard you were in trouble, and from the newspapers I have seen that you have very few friends."

"After all I've done for people!" said Peace. "It's worse than Judas Iscariot, my lady!"

"I also am going to die," she said with a smile. "The doctor has given me six months—three months perhaps, if I was so silly as to take this journey. But three months or six months, what does it matter?"

Peace was interested.

"I shouldn't believe no doctors if I was you, my lady," he said. "A couple of bottles of medicine'll put you right. I used to take sarsaparilla."

She laughed softly.

"One doctor, two doctors, six doctors—they all tell the same lie!"

She did not speak English as fluently as she had done, had found some difficulty in finding the right word.

"Well, I have come, I have seen you, and I say 'au revoir.' Somebody in Switzerland will think of you whilst she thinks at all! My love to you, little man!"

She kissed her finger-tips daintily, this gaunt woman,

and rose. Peace went back to his cell, cursing monotonously.

"If I'd only remembered it, and she'd stopped jawing about herself, I could have got hundreds of pounds out of her. As a matter of fact, I'm here because of her. Die? She won't die."

Somebody else did. They found him stiff and cold, propped against the wall of the prison, his head hanging drunkenly. It was on the morning, just before the big crowd began to assemble on the snow powdered road. The policeman who had met him before had missed him for a day or two, but recognised the pilot jacket and the gloved hands folded helplessly in his lap.

"His name's Carton," he said to the doctor who was called. "Is it suicide?"

The doctor shook his head.

"No, not so far as I can tell at the moment. It seems to me to be a case of exhaustion, possibly alcoholism."

The policeman had never heard the word and sought a translation.

"Booze," said the doctor coarsely.

The policeman had a romantic mind.

"Might it be broken heart?" he suggested.

"Don't be ridiculous," said the doctor.

. . . . . .

Peace took his time over his toilet that morning. One of the warders, his nerves on edge, asked fretfully how long he was going to be. Those deep eyes of Peace transfixed him; the restive jaw moved from side to side.

"What's the hurry?" he asked. "Are you being hung or me?"

He was all for his rights. He was entitled to his leisure, to his smoke, to the best breakfast he could procure, to a glass of brandy if he wanted it. He was the most important person in Leeds. No king, no eastern potentate, could command such ceremonial. Politeness from governors, reverence from chaplains, attention from all the world. All England was standing still, its face turned towards the grim gaol at Leeds

Reporters were flocking from the four corners of the kingdom ; newspaper presses were waiting, the centre of small armies of distributors. At tens of thousands of breakfast tables people would be saying :

" That rascal was hanged this morning."

Peace was conscious of this fact ; he had already composed the speech which he would make to the reporters, and which would be printed all over the world. A speech necessarily charged with piety, because the situation demanded an acknowledgment of his penitence. It was the convention of executions that the condemned man should also offer advice to those whose feet were straying towards evil, and that he should cite himself, with a melancholy pride, as an awful example of the place to which wrongdoing brings a man. He would maintain all the best traditions.

So he thanked the governor and the warders, remarked on the coldness of the morning and the dulness of it, and hoped all his enemies would be forgiven, and mentioned a few he hadn't forgiven himself.

A man came into the cell, a man with a beard ; stocky, not too well dressed, but obviously The Man. In one hand he carried a body strap ; the other hand, rather podgy, was extended.

" I'm very sorry that I've got to do this, but it's my duty," he said.

Peace nodded approvingly, and Marwood, the hangman, waited ; but the inevitable query did not come. Peace did not ask if it would hurt. He had always strongly disapproved of that question, and was true to his principles.

" I have to do this, and I hope there's no ill-feeling," said Marwood, busy with the body strap about the little man's waist.

" That's all right," said Peace. . . .

The speech to the reporters was over. He mounted the scaffold with a firm step, because that was also part of the convention.

And here he was at the end of the path, upon a trap that slightly sagged beneath him, with a cloth upon his face and a rope round his neck. He had been taken hence from the place whence he came, and he was now at the place of execution. Everything according to plan and in order. He was hanged by the neck until he was dead.

On the afternoon of that day a prosperous hop merchant in Blackheath, rummaging through his desk, found a small bottle of crystals, frowned at them, rattled them, took out the cork and smelt them.

" I don't know where these came from," he said to his wife. . . . " No, my dear, don't throw them on the fire : they may explode. Give them to the maid and tell her to pour them down the kitchen sink."

MYSTERY AT FRIAR'S PARDON

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO A LIONESS

A RAY of watery sunshine found its way through the division of the curtains. Mr. Charles Fox-Browne opened one eye and immediately shut it again. There was something wrong with his room, but with the desire of the half-awake not to be bothered, he tried to recapture sleep.

But it would not come. He rolled upon his back and opened both eyes. After blinking them once, he realised that there was nothing wrong with the room, or rather that the only thing wrong with it was that it was not his own room. His consciousness fully returned, he remembered, although his gaze was fixed upon the ceiling, exactly how unpleasant was the contrast between this room with its outlook over grey Bayswater roofs and the room at The Chase with its outlook over the fields and copses of half a county.

He rolled over on his side and, groping under the pillow, found his watch. Its hands showed the time as being already ten minutes to nine. Knowing, even after one day at the Munster Court Hotel (private board residence for ladies and gentlemen) that if one wanted even a reasonable imitation of breakfast, it was well to be in the dining-room by a quarter past nine at the latest, he threw back the clothes and swung his legs to the ground.

At nine-fifteen precisely, he was downstairs and collecting from the dusty, baize-covered rack in the hall, three letters. He slipped them into a pocket and made for the dining-room. His table, procured for him by a waiter who could see in this new guest a possibility

of larger tips than were usual in the Munster Court, was in one of the four bay windows. He threaded his way to it between a mass of other little tables, mostly, at this hour, with their chairs occupied. His passage drew many glances both overt and covert. For what it was, the Munster Court was better than most, so that there were few changes in its clientele and newcomers of the virile and well-turned-out and generally pleasant appearance of Mr. Fox-Browne were unusual.

Charles sat down. To the waiter who appeared with unusual quickness at his elbow, he gave an order for coffee and bacon and sausages. He would have liked porridge but he mistrusted lumps. Waiting, he took from his pocket the letters. Two—one of which he knew for a small bill and the other for an advertisement—had been forwarded from The Chase. The other was addressed direct to the Munster Court. This was odd. The only person he had told of Fosdyke's crash and his own consequent out-of-workness, had been Vining and this letter was not in Vining's hand. He slid open the envelope and drew from it a single sheet of thick, blue, rather ostentatiously expensive notepaper. The address at its head was Friar's Pardon, Oakholme, Nr. Deyning Water and it was dated the fourth of November. The letter was typewritten and ran:

"DEAR SIR,

"I am desired by Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene to explain that she has heard from her friend Sir Edmund Blondel that you have recently resigned from the post of Estate Steward to Mr. Barrington Fosdyke. Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene understood from Sir Edmund that this information had come through a mutual acquaintance of yours and Sir Edmund's, Mr. Francis Vining.

"Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene wishes me to ask you whether, if the report of the termination of your engage-

ment with Mr. Fosdyke is correct, you would entertain the possibility of accepting a similar post in connection with her estate at Friar's Pardon. Mrs. Lester-Greene will be in London when you receive this. She will be staying at the Savoy Hotel. Perhaps you would be so good, if the proposition is of any interest to you, as to ring up there asking for Mrs. Lester-Greene's secretary.

"Yours faithfully,

"NORMAN SANDYS,

"Secretary."

Charles read this letter upon the morning of Monday, the sixth of November. At one-fifteen on the afternoon of Wednesday the eighth of November, he was sitting, with two women and a man, at a table in the corner of the Savoy grill-room. The two women were Enid Lester-Greene, for the past twenty years the highest-selling woman novelist, and Gladys, her daughter. The man was the signer of the letter.

Charles, finishing his cocktail, made unobtrusive study of the party. Enid Lester-Greene was, he judged, a woman of about fifty. Actually she was half-way down her fifty ninth year. She was tall and tailored with excellent severity, the one false note, or so it seemed to Charles's experienced and critical eye, being the long and over ornate ear-rings. These, thought Charles, would have better befitted anything than the coat and skirt and tight-fitting hat For the rest of her, Enid Lester-Greene was of a cleverly constrained plumpness with much but well graduated bust; the clear, slightly over-flushed complexion of the recently massaged; stubby, short-fingered, over-jewelled and manicured hands and a large, yet small-featured face which managed to combine in its expression shrewdness and kindliness from the small, bright blue eyes; sentimentality from the short, broad nose; and ruthless egoism

from the curious mouth with its long thin upper lip and its short, out-thrust, over-red under-lip. All her movements, though restrained enough, had an air about them of commandistic decision. She was not, it appeared, one of those who bully waiters but yet, it seemed to Charles, that if he were a waiter, he would far rather be bullied. To her daughter her attitude was one of pride and camaraderie spiced with benevolent protection. To her secretary her attitude was one of complete but quaintly feudal friendliness, such as must have been shown by the better kind of knight to the best kind of esquire. To Charles her attitude was one nicely combining the rôle of hostess with that of possible employer. Such hair as could be seen from under her small hat was of that true shade of silver which is always beautiful.

The daughter, save for a certain superficial likeness confined to the face only, was a different matter. She was a tall, lanky, rather ungainly young woman of some twenty-three years. Her clothes were good but she wore them badly. Her hair and brows were of the blackest but her eyes were of the same cold, bright blue as her mother's. Her skin was sallow. Her hands, unlike her mother's, were small and delicate with long graceful fingers. Again, unlike her mother, she wore no jewellery of any kind. In the unwinking but somehow fugitive stare of her blue eyes was something of the maternal arrogance, but this was belied by the shrinking stoop of the narrow shoulders, and the low, at times almost inaudible voice. When she spoke, which was rarely, her tone and attitude differed even more than her mother's according to the person she addressed. To Charles—she only spoke to him three times during the whole course of luncheon—they were dead, with a flat, uninterested attempt at civility. To her mother, they were more alive; at one moment

almost loving; at the next, surly; at the next, merely rude. To Sandys, they were a curious component of all four, but it was noticeable to Charles that Sandys was the only one of the three at whom she looked directly all the time she was talking. There was no powder—which would have improved it—upon her face; but upon her lips, which did not need it because at no time could the mouth have been beautiful, was too much over-scarlet lipstick.

Of the three, it was a little paradoxically to the situation, the secretary who was the most interesting. Norman Sandys was a man in the early thirties. He was a little over middle height but seemed more by reason of his lean, but not mean, lankiness. He was, though quietly, very well dressed. Despite the almost aggressive Englishness of his name, there was a good deal about his appearance which was Latin. His hair, though it bore every evidence of a desire to suppress the fact, had distinct waves and was black as a raven; blacker even than that of the Lester-Greene girl; black with the sort of indigo blackness found so often among the peoples of Spain and Southern France and Italy. His skin was of the kind so rarely found but so often mentioned in fiction as olive-tinted. His teeth were very white. His features were good—wide-set eyes, long, shapely nose, well cut, generous mouth. His manners were better than his appearance. His words, used sparingly, Charles noticed, but with effect, were intelligent, well-chosen, well-placed and had meaning. It would have been easy, thought Charles, to be either rude or parasitical to this Lester-Greene woman, but Norman Sandys was neither. He was free and a man. And also a gentleman.

The meal, chosen by its hostess before she and her guests sat to it, was admirable. It lasted, with desultory conversation and moderately quick service,

from a quarter past one until ten minutes past two. At a quarter past two, when coffee cups were empty, Gladys Lester-Greene broke a long silence. She said, with a sudden twist of her head and half her slouching body towards her mother:

"Time's getting on. Got to meet Ivor at Brent's in ten minutes." She stretched out a sallow, graceful hand and collected her bag.

Her mother smiled at her with a smile which Charles, covertly watching, thought was weirdly blent of love and thwarted commandism. "I'm sorry, my dear," said Enid Lester-Greene looking at the small gold watch upon her left wrist. "I didn't know we had taken so long . . . Yes, by all means . . ."

The girl rose, made murmured sounds in her throat with half a glance at Charles and a full glance at Sandys. She walked away from them, down an aisle between the tables, and presently turned left and was lost to sight.

Mrs. Lester-Greene looked again at her watch. "I suggest, Mr. Fox-Browne," she said, "that we go up to my suite." She smiled with much charm. "It's easier somehow to talk business there than down here in public." She rose with majesty and preceded the two men from the restaurant. Near the screen by the service tables, she stopped to exchange greetings with an acquaintance, and Charles heard whispered in his ear from Sandys at his shoulder:

"Ruby Matherson. Musical comedy. *Oui, Oui, Mon Oncle; Madagascar Maid; The Golden Fan;* words, lyrics *and* music. Wouldn't think it to look at her, would you?"

Just before him, Mrs. Lester-Greene straightened her restrained, massive body. Charles shook his head dumbly. He would not have thought it. He fell into step behind Mrs. Lester-Greene and shortly, by way of

lift and softly carpeted passage, was in Suite A37b.

"And now," said Mrs. Lester-Greene, twenty minutes later, "as to the question of salary. The work, so far as I can see, Mr. Fox-Browne, will be a little less arduous than was the case at Mr. Fosdyke's but at the same time, I want it done, as I know you will do it, supremely well. And it has always been my policy to have things done well and to pay for having them done well. We have not mentioned—by the way, Mr. Fox-Browne, I hope you haven't any objection to my mentioning figures in front of Mr. Sandys?—I assure you that as my confidential secretary . . ."

"Not an objection," said Charles tactfully but without truth, "in the world."

"As I said," Mrs. Lester-Greene continued, "I have no idea what Mr. Fosdyke paid you, but having made a few inquiries and added my own ideas to them, I suggest a salary of a thousand a year. This, of course, to be in addition to what I believe is called your keep. I'm afraid, Mr. Fox-Browne, that I haven't a separate house for you but I assure you that we shall do our very best to make you comfortable at Friar's Pardon. . . ." She hesitated a moment, to add with a sort of regal diffidence very trying to the listener: "I need not add, of course, that you will be treated at Friar's Pardon as one of the family." She ceased abruptly. Her bright blue eyes fixed themselves upon Charles. There was an expectant look in them.

Charles played up, not because of the expectant look, but following his inclination. He strove to keep jubilance from his voice and succeeded. He said:

"I don't know whether you want my answer on the spot, Mrs. Lester-Greene?"

"I do. That, I am afraid, is my only way of doing business. Like most writers"—she laughed a little; not altogether a pleasant sound—"I am not a very good

business man. What I say I mean and what arrangement I propose has to be clinched when I propose it or not at all."

Charles bowed, repressing an irritating twitch at the corners of his mouth. He said:

"That's my way too. I don't need any time to think your offer over, Mrs. Greene. I accept it."

There was a moment's silence—not too comfortable. Enid Lester-Greene seemed, her lips slightly parted, to be waiting for some addition to this remark of her steward. But none came. Imperceptibly she lifted her shoulders as if shaking some irksome weight from them.

"Very well then," she said, "that's settled." She turned to Sandys. "Norman, you had better take this over. Perhaps you would arrange with Mr Fox-Browne as to how soon he would start and all that sort of thing. . . . You know . . ." The great lady was admirably vague.

"I suggest," said Sandys, with his clipped and curiously precise accent, "that it might be useful to you, Mr. Fox-Browne, if, as well as making arrangements —which could be done in five minutes—we had a talk. Although we haven't been there long I know Friar's Pardon pretty well. I have no doubt I could answer a lot of questions you probably want to ask." He looked across at his employer as if for confirmation of his next words. "I was going to suggest that Mr. Fox-Browne dined with me this evening."

"Admirable," said the great lady, still vague. "Excellent." She took a cigarette from a box upon the table and lit it; her fifth or sixth, Charles noticed, since they had entered the room certainly not more than twenty minutes ago. She rose and walked with a sort of woolly majesty to the window where she stood looking out over the river and smoking furiously.

Charles, hoping that this was his congé, rose too. He opened his mouth to speak, but before the words came speech was arrested by a sudden movement of the figure at the window. It wheeled round sharply with a sudden snapping of finger and thumb.

"Norman!" said Enid Lester-Greene in a new tone; a hard, brusque, urgent tone. Sandys apparently knew what was coming. There appeared in his hands, as if by a conjuring trick, a slim, leather-bound note-book and a fountain pen. He said nothing, waiting with pen poised over a blank page. "Arabelle," said Enid Lester-Greene—and now her voice was different again, being a dreamy unaccented monotone, "is not, after all, in love with Eustace. After being discharged from Sandridge's Super Store, she obtains work as a film extra. At first the life is half interesting, half abhorrent, to her but gradually becomes monotonous and boring. *Until* one day, loitering near a set where the great European director . . . What shall I call him? . . ."

"Van Densch." Sandy's voice was very low, little more than a whisper. "Where the great European director, Von Brinsch," continued the monotone, "is directing a scene in his masterpiece *Fiery Souls*. . . . No, *Souls Aflame*. Von Brinsch, dissatisfied with the acting of a girl playing one of the minor parts, suddenly sees Arabelle, beckons her forward imperiously, and cutting short all her explanations and expostulations, makes her rehearse the scene. This is her first start in what is to be a whirlwind career. . . . Got all that?"

Sandys nodded. He seemed, Charles noticed, to know by changes in the voice of his employer, exactly what she was going to do a little time before she did it. For he shut the note-book with a soft little snap and slid it back into his pocket.

Enid Lester-Greene turned to Charles. She seemed

to make obvious effort to recall her mind. At last she smiled graciously, "You must forgive me, Mr. Fox-Browne," she said. "But sometimes, when I get an idea, I am so eager to get it down on paper that everything else goes by the board." She laughed a little. "This trait has got me into some very embarrassing situations. I remember once when I was dining at the Spanish Embassy . . ." A tap at the door interrupted her. The smile was replaced by a frown. "Come in," she said. The door opened and the frown vanished. "My *dear*!" She went forward with a smooth rush like a galleon in full sail. "My dear!" She enfolded her visitor.

The visitor, free again, put up a slim, gloved hand and gave a readjusting pat to the little gleaming coil of corn coloured hair which showed beneath her hat. She said in a soft, deep voice:

"I hope you don't mind my coming straight in like that. I told them you were expecting me, which wasn't true."

"Mind?" said Enid Lester-Greene. "Of course I don't, my dear Lesley."

Sandys stood up. He bowed. "Good-afternoon, Mrs. Destrier," he said.

The visitor smiled; a smile which made Charles wish, as indeed he had already begun to wish, that this should not be his last sight of this woman.

"May I," said Enid Lester-Greene, "present Mr. Charles Fox-Browne. . . . My niece, Mrs. Destrier. . . ."

Charles bowed and received a smile; a smile which, he noted with gratification, was fully the equal of that accorded to Sandys. He took unobtrusive stock of Lesley Destrier, finding it difficult to remove his eyes at the proper time.

As has been said before, Charles's eye was both ex-

perienced and critical, but in Lesley Destrier it found nothing that it could help but admire in face or shape or appointment. She was, he judged, a woman in the later twenties. She was a small woman but also, that precious rarity, a small woman with an admirable shape. She was neither dumpy nor lean, angular nor over-rounded. And the excellence of her carriage made her seem almost tall. Charles thought of her, at once, as a lovely blend of two women in fiction with whom, over recent years of reading, he had fallen head over ears in love—Leora Arrowsmith, the apotheosis of the mundane, and the heavenly Lydia of Ronald Fraser's *Flying Draper*. Her clothes were matters of a quiet intrinsic beauty but were yet so much a part of her as to be almost unnoticed. Her face was beautiful both despite and by reason of its irregularity of feature. The eyes beneath the fine-drawn golden brows were of a colour which seemed by some wizardry to change with every moment and yet to be immutable. If they were blue, it was a blue which might, when we looked again, be the most lovely of greens. And most certainly they were not green. They smiled, those eyes, when a smile touched the lovely, rather full-lipped mouth, and yet there seemed, Charles found himself thinking, to be always in them—not upon their surface but in their incalculable depths—some mirroring of a permanent emotion far removed from laughter; some compound of a defensive hardness with an unhappiness unceasingly striven against. He did not early succeed in removing his gaze.

What Lesley Destrier saw—and what, in their ways and turns Enid Lester-Greene, her daughter and her secretary had seen—was a man of thirty-odd years in age and a bare inch under six feet in height; a man with the lean, hard looseness of the horseman in body and that type of clever, pleasing, bony head, some-

thing skull-like, which is so often found in Scots but was in this case an Englishman's. His colouring too, was blond, but with a different, harded blondness—a blondness bitten by sun and other weathers, native and foreign. Under brows bleached almost to whiteness, steel-grey eyes looked out steadily—and, some said, with a humorously bitter cynicism—at whatever might interest their owner. His speech was curt, with a tendency towards clipping unnecessary articles and adjectives and also, but not blatantly, final "g's." His clothes were good; his manner a curious and not unpleasant blend of the genial and the forbidding; his voice deep with an edge of huskiness to it which was remnant of German gas. He was clean-shaved and tanned to a permanent shade of brown-red perhaps a little too deep for most tastes; too deep, that is, until he smiled, when the sudden whiteness of his teeth compensated in full measure. When he had nothing to say he did not, as do so many, say anything at all, and—perhaps to the discerning, such as Lesley Destrier, his most immediately noteworthy trait—when there was nothing to move for, he was really motionless.

There were some moments then of desultory chatter in which Charles did not join. He was a man who, on occasion, spoke much but this was not one of the occasions. He realised with an inward smile that since he had arrived at the hotel nearly two hours ago, he had not emitted, he supposed, more than a couple of hundred words. He shook hands with his hostess and employer; bowed to Lesley Destrier and made exit. Turning left in the corridor in search of the lifts, he found Sandys at his shoulder; a Sandys who was looking at him with the expression of a man who would like to smile in comradely and tolerant amusement at company just left but is yet doubtful as to how such a

smile would be received. Charles, always careful in new surroundings, let the look pass. He said:

"Kind of you to ask me to dine. Mean it?"

Sandys laughed. "Of course I did. That's what I came after you for. Know the Oddities?"

Charles nodded.

"Right," said Sandys. "How about meeting me there at half-past seven. I'm afraid I can't make it earlier because the old . . . because Mrs. Lester-Greene isn't going out herself until just before that and I've got to be on tap."

"Half-past seven," Charles said, "will suit me. Change?"

Sandys nodded. "Black tie . . . Here's the lift. Well, *au revoir.*"

"*Au revoir,*" said Charles.

As the lift descended, he saw that Sandys still stood outside the grille looking down.

As Charles came out into Savoy Court, the time was twenty-five minutes to four. He walked up into the Strand and turned left. He walked fast, not because he had anywhere to go, but because to walk at all with him meant four miles an hour. As he walked he pondered his luck. He had been considered, by himself as well as others, fortunate in getting, two years before, a job with Fosdyke. To lose that job owing to Fosdyke's crash and to find another job of the same kind even more handsomely paid all within the space of ninety-six hours, was good luck averaging upon the miraculous. The only snag he could see so far, though of course, he might hear of others at dinner tonight, was the character of his employer, but this might turn out to be no snag after all. A man doesn't knock about the world for sixteen years or so and always keep himself firmly upon his feet (not, of course, counting the war) without acquiring some measure of tact. . . .

Those really were extraordinary eyes! Were they blue? No, they were not blue. And they weren't green either. But if you didn't call them blue, and you didn't call them green, what on earth or in heaven could you call them? And that voice! He had never—or so he had thought until half an hour ago—liked a deep voice in a woman. He had never—or so he had thought until half an hour ago—liked small women. He found himself without any difficulty sloughing these prejudices; more than sloughing them; turning them, in fact, from antipathies into favourites. . . .

"Oh! Sorry!" said Charles suddenly, reaching out a long arm and saving from destruction the stout woman into whom his thoughts had let him cannon, nearly knocking her beneath the front wheels of an omnibus. He walked on with more care. He came, by way of Cockspur Street, Pall Mall and St. James's Street, into Bond Street. Half-way up Bond Street his eye was caught by the multi-coloured display of books in Ferguson's window. He turned into Ferguson's. He said:

"I want a copy of Enid Lester-Greene's latest."

His server, a blond, bland and supercilious young man, brought to him with reluctance a vividly jacketed copy of *Paradise for Two*. Seven and sixpence changed hands and Charles, the book, mercifully covered with brown paper, tucked under his arm, made tracks for Oxford Street.

CHAPTER II

PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN

CHARLES MORTIMER FOX-BROWNE was a puzzle to his few friends as he had been, before they died in his fourteenth year, a puzzle to his parents, and as he would be, to the end of his life, a good deal of a puzzle to himself. Considering his parentage this . . . *oddness*

it will have to be called . . . was all the more peculiar; for there was nothing leaning in any way towards oddity in either of his parents. His father had been a well-to-do and non-practising cleric; his mother just the sort of pretty " county " girl one would expect a well-to-do non-practising cleric to take to his bosom. They had lived, these two—the man some fifteen years older than the woman—a life of amiable and entirely unimaginative stolidity. Charles was their only child. Neither in looks nor character did he resemble either of them. From the moment when at the age of two years and six months he first began to speak, it is doubtful whether they ever understood more than a third of what he was continually trying to get at. The child, of course, did not know himself, but whereas intelligent and truly sympathetic parents would have shown him, these two amiable cabbages could be of no assistance. This utter lack of sympathy and understanding (though he was, of course, treated in all physical matters with a facile ready sympathy) may in some measure account for the puzzle that he became as a man.

Two days after Charles's thirteenth birthday, the father died, to be followed six months later by his wife.

Charles, then in his first term at St. James's, became the ward of his uncle, Bertram Browne. Bertram Browne was a sufficiently wealthy bachelor with two objects in life, the first being to shoot as many of the larger animals as he could; the second to avoid, apart from those attendant upon this pursuit, all troubles. Charles was a trouble and was therefore very successfully avoided.

He had, as a schoolboy, a lonely life. He was not, although the best stand-off half the school fifteen had had for many years and also an excellent boxer, popular with the athletic coteries. He was not, although a mathematician of considerable brilliance for his years,

even popular with the more serious minded. He made, in fact, during his four years at St. James's, only two friends and these, both older than himself, left school at the outbreak of war to be killed—one early in 1915 and the other in the autumn of that year. Charles himself, who was to have gone to Cambridge, took himself away from school just after his seventeenth birthday in the middle of 1915. He said not a word of this to his guardian, but enlisted in the 18th Hussars as a trooper under the name of Fox. With a draft to the 18th he was sent to Egypt in January of 1916, to see considerable service there. In October, 1916, when he had attained the rank of Squadron Sergeant Major, he began suddenly to have thoughts of a commission. He accordingly wrote to his Uncle Bertram, and Uncle Bertram, choosing the easiest way out of this new worry, pulled such strings as he might, with the result that before the middle of January, 1917, Charles, now a Second Lieutenant in the Artillery, was on the Somme. He remained in France, finishing up with the rank of Major and a varied array of decorations, until the end of the war; remained, that is, with the exception of two brief leaves and one long stay in hospital at the beginning of 1918, while he recovered from a dose of shrapnel in his back and gas in his left lung.

After the war he found himself, his father's once considerable income reduced by the utter post-war worthlessness of the foreign securities, with an income of not more than £200 a year. From December, 1919, until December, 1920, he enjoyed himself upon the first year's income and his considerable gratuity. In January, 1921, he went to the Argentine, having bought himself an interest in a horse-breeding ranch belonging to an army friend. At the end of eighteen months he sold his share, now worth considerably more than what he had paid, to an Argentinian, and came back to England

with a fairly handsome profit to show. He stayed in England for only a month and when next heard of by those few people with whom he kept in regular though sporadic touch, he was in Canada, this time, in some way which these friends could never quite fathom, connected with lumber. England next saw him in the spring of 1925. He seemed, and was, in a small way prosperous. Now that income of £200 had been permanently raised to £500. This time he stayed in England, to interest himself in quick succession and in this order, in Journalism, Publishing, Housing Schemes, and the formation of a small company for the Refining of Crude Petroleum.

It is to be noted that out of each of these adventurous ventures he extricated himself, without harm to others, financially benefited and then, in 1927, just as it seemed that he would go on from strength to strength and in fact had begun not to care that he might if he went on this way become what the *Evening Press* would doubtless have called a " Young Napoleon of Finance," came the breakdown in his health.

During the first years after the war, the effects of the gassing, and suppressed and never admitted shell-shock, had been held at bay by an extremely active and wholly out-of-door existence. But after three years of more sedentary and office routine life, first the gas and then the shell-harried nerves began to get their own back upon him. He saw doctors, and, unlike most of his fellows, listened to what they said. And his life changed again.

He had now, when all his affairs were put in order, an income of something near to £1000 a year; not enough to live a life of really active idleness and not enough to make it necessary to take the first work which came along. He began, when fully recovered, to look about for the ideal job and at last found it.

He had always a way of eventually getting what he wanted. This job was that of steward to the large estates of one Barrington Fosdyke, a Canadian Steel Millionaire turned—and turned well—into English squire. He started to work with Fosdyke in the summer of 1928 and under his rule, for two years and a bit, Fosdyke's estates prospered exceedingly.

It was during his second year with Fosdyke that there occurred an incident whose relation may serve to throw some light—although a light in itself odd—upon Charles's character. It was an incident which also affected Charles's life; or rather the background to that life.

His nearest living relative was a young woman of about his own age, an orphaned niece of his mother. They had seen during their lives but little of each other; nevertheless it was to Charles that Irene Fox turned immediately. To do her justice she was desperate and could think, in all probability, of no one else. She came to Charles with her story, into which it is not necessary to go here. It was a story of genuine ill luck aided by a not unusual amount of gullibility; but put into a nut-shell her visit came to this—would Cousin Charles lend her, with the absolute certainty that it would be returned within a year, £10,000?

She was in great distress; she looked indeed upon the verge of collapse, a woman kept going only by nervous courage. Charles looked at her and grunted. The interview took place in the small sitting-room of the lodge at The Chase. He looked at her again and smiled. He took a cheque-book from a drawer and wrote, in his very small, rather angular and altogether peculiar hand, a cheque payable to Miss Irene Fox for £10,000. He said, blotting this amazing document:

"That's dated two days from now. It will take me

that time to arrange to sell out. Bung it back in a year."

But unluckily for him, as it was in a way for Irene Fox, Irene Fox met her death in a hunting accident three months from the time of the loan. After much palaver and many months, Charles received a cheque from her Executors, but this cheque was for £500. And that was all—quite inevitably all—that Charles would ever see of his £10,000. He read the letter once; said three words; shrugged his shoulders and forgot all about it. That phrase is not a figure of speech but the truth. His income now was just as it had been when he had ceased to be a soldier, but what was done, with Charles, was done.

So much for the man's external history up to the time of the beginning of this, the most curious adventure of a curiously adventurous life. To give this history was easy; to give, in a few words, a resumé of the man's character or self, is difficult almost to the point of impossibility. All that can be done is to write that, at this time—the beginning of his thirty-fifth year—Charles Fox-Browne was a man whom few people knew at all and those only to realise how little of him they knew; a man whose knowledge of himself was far greater than most men's in that he knew how little about himself was within his knowledge; a man of wide and varied experience who never took it for granted that this experience necessarily gave him advantage in fresh fields; a man not selfish, but with a fair leaven of egoism; a man difficult to "get next to," a man that many had called hard but a choicer few the reverse; a man perhaps over self-reliant in that he generally preferred his own counsel; and, lastly and importantly, a man who, despite perhaps more than average experiment, had never yet been wholly in love.

CHAPTER III

PROLOGUE IN DIALOGUE

NORMAN SANDYS proved, as Charles had expected he would, a pleasant and cheerful host. The cuisine of the Oddities Club is excellent and the wine cellar better. Of both Sandys showed his knowledge and appreciation. Charles wondered idly behind the conversation what was Sandys's salary. It must, if he were not indeed a man of private means, be large, for the Oddities is not a cheap club and Sandys's clothes were obviously built by no cheap tailor. His taste in tobacco, too, was that of a man most comfortably placed.

"Have you ever heard," said Sandys suddenly, "of Friar's Pardon?" He looked across the table at Charles with something of the same look in his eyes as he had worn when walking along the Savoy corridor after the afternoon's interview.

Charles shook his head.

Sandys drew from his pocket a fat wallet and from a compartment in the back of the wallet took a folded packet of press cuttings. "As Friar's Pardon," he said, "is going to be your home from home, it might interest you to run your eye over these."

"Thanks," said Charles. He stretched out a hand and took the wad. Without remark he read the cuttings through; but, as however differently phrased the burden of their words was the same, it is only necessary to give here an extract from the *Evening Planet* of October the fourteenth. It was a large cutting filling the whole of the last two columns of the front page.

NOVELIST AND HAUNTED HOUSE

Enid Lester-Greene Buys Sinister Mansion

"I WILL SHOW THEM THAT IT IS ALL NONSENSE!"

The *Evening Planet* learns that the ancient Jacobean manor of Friar's Pardon, situated on top of the Wester Down near Deyning Water, has been purchased by Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene, the famous novelist and playwright. The name of Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene is famous throughout the English speaking world and, in particular, *Evening Planet* readers will remember her by reason of the recent publication in serial form in its columns of two of her most charming stories, *Sir Galahad Comes Home* and *Oasis Love.*

An *Evening Planet* representative called yesterday upon Mrs. Lester-Greene at the charming old-world inn The Coach and Horses in Deyning Water. Here Mrs. Lester-Greene and her daughter Miss Gladys Lester-Greene are staying to supervise the finishing touches to Friar's Pardon.

"Friar's Pardon," said Mrs. Lester-Greene, her blue eyes twinkling with amusement, "is the most beautiful home in England. It is the house I have dreamt about all my life. Do you think that I was to be put off buying it and living in it by a lot of old wives' tales? If you do, you are entirely wrong!"

Mrs. Lester-Greene was referring to the age old superstition in the district concerning the ancient manor.

Friar's Pardon, the *Planet* representative learned, was built in the reign of James the Second, by one Sir Roger Westmacott and was held by his descendants for three generations. In the year 1800, it was purchased by a retired silk merchant of the name of Deaves and was inhabited by the Deaves family until the year 1808, when Henry Deaves, the son, met his death.

After that death it was again uninhabited and has remained so for the intervening hundred odd years.

Now for the legend, which our representative states has at least a certain backing in fact. Two years after the completion of the building, Sir Roger Westmacott died under mysterious conditions in his bedroom. The house became then the property of his elder son Sir Derryck Westmacott. Sir Derryck, being a soldier and away from home and England when his father died, did not return until 1706, five years later. In the meantime his mother and his younger brother and sisters lived in complete safety at Friar's Pardon. Two years, however, after his return, Sir Derryck, too, died in the same mysterious way as his father and moreover in the same room. History was repeated with hardly any variation in the case of Sir Derryck's heir, his younger brother Francis. The next heir would have nothing to do with Friar's Pardon. He tried to sell it but could not and so he left it, shifting himself and the rest of that line of the Westmacott family, which is now extinct, to Ashingdean in Kent.

In the year 1800, ninety years later, the house was purchased from the Westmacott family by Bertram Deaves who expended, in addition to the purchase price, a considerable sum upon its renovation and partial re-building and in the year 1802 took up his residence there, pooh-poohing all local stories and warnings. He had not been in residence at Friar's Pardon for six months before he, too, died at the early age of fifty-six when he was in the prime of health. His death was as mysterious as had been the deaths of the Westmacotts over half a century before. His son Henry Deaves, after the death of his father, travelled in Europe for upwards of five years and then, seeming to have been a man of dire obstinacy, he returned to live at Friar's Pardon. One year, however, after his return in the year

1808, he died. The next heir of the Deaves followed what seemed to him the wiser course and gave up the house. He, as the Westmacotts had done before him, attempted to sell it but met with no more success. He therefore sealed up the wing of the house where the mysterious deaths had always occurred and installed a caretaker. This caretaker and his two successors have lived there in entire safety until the present day.

And now Friar's Pardon has been bought by Mrs. Lester-Greene, who will in no way subscribe to belief in any supernatural influence over the house, but is nevertheless intensely interested in the legend. As has been said before, all the deaths occurred in the east wing of the house—the only part which had not been either renovated or re-built by the first Deaves—the entrance to which the last Deaves had bricked in. Mrs. Lester-Greene has had this party wall removed and has thrown open the wing together with the rest of the house. She has in fact, decided to take up her own quarters in the east wing.

"The story," said Mrs. Lester-Greene to our representative, "is really extraordinarily interesting. Purely, of course, a series of coincidences, but what strange coincidences! It was the way in which all these men met their deaths that the local physicians were bothered by. It is difficult, from the records existing at the present time, to find out any more than that the doctors —or leeches as I believe they were called at the time of the Westmacotts"—said Mrs. Lester-Greene with a merry laugh, "were so bewildered as to be frightened of giving an opinion. In the time of the Deaves, however, we find that in the case of Henry Deaves there was a doctor who swore that the body of Henry Deaves gave every evidence of his having been killed by drowning although *his room was upstairs, there was no water*

in or near the room and no signs of water upon his clothes or person or in the room at all."

The *Evening Planet* consider this history of Friar's Pardon so interesting that they have prevailed upon Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene to send them, from time to time, news of her occupation of the house.

Mrs. Lester-Greene is much amused by the efforts which are being made by her relatives and friends to dissuade her from her project but, as has been said above, while having no fear of any supernatural influence and, really, no belief in such, she is yet intensely interested in the story. " In fact," she told our representative, " if anything further had been wanted to clinch my desire to buy Friar's Pardon, the story would have done it."

The other cuttings, reaching over the whole period between this day and the 8th November, and the 14th October of the first cutting, were of every size and from every conceivable periodical.

Charles folded the clippings neatly and handed them across the table to his host. " Thanks," he said, and that was all.

Charles was silent. Sandys, unabashed, still regarded now barely veiled. *" Publicitas,"* said Sandys, *" omnia vincit."*

Charles was silent. Sandys, unabashed, still regarded him with twinkling eyes. And presently this twinkling became a full-bodied smile, almost a grin. " Look here," he said, " I suppose you're thinking that we shouldn't, or rather I shouldn't, be casting aspersions at the character of our common employer. But I'm not really, you know. If I told you that she was fond of peppermints, and couldn't live without them, you'd have thought nothing of it, but because I intimate she's fond of publicity and can't live without that, you want

to freeze me. After all, Fox-Browne, there is essentially no difference at all between a passion for peppermints and a passion for publicity; both are reasonably harmless save for their slightly unpleasant effect upon other people. Therefore, in this case, the slight unpleasantness is practically negatived by the thing's intrinsic interest. What I wan . . ."

Charles smiled. "All right," he said, "you win."

Sandys bowed. "Apart from this publicity question," he said, "which really is a passion with E. L.-G., she's got a whole lot of admirable qualities. If you like I'll tell you exactly what you're going to feel about her." His dark eyes, very shrewd, fixed their gaze upon the faintly smiling but still veiled grey ones of his guest. "For the first week you're going to bear with her, thinking that she's a rather insufferable, conceited old—middle-aged lady. The second week you're going to dislike her cordially as an interfering velvet-gloved bully and, from the beginning of the third week you're going to see, that, like all of us, she's got her good points. After the third week these good points are going to be borne in upon you more and more strongly until about the beginning of the second month you'll really like working for her. You see, you'll be left alone in your job considerably more than it's possible that I should be left alone in mine. The process I've just described to you has happened to me, but it's taken me nearly two years to get to the stage that I predict for you in two months."

"How long," said Charles suddenly, "have you been with her?"

"Three years and seven months." Sandys smiled; this time a half smile to himself. "Ever read anything of hers?"

"This afternoon," said Charles, his face more ex-

pressionless and skull-like than usual, " I bought a copy of *Paradise for Two . . .*"

Sandys interrupted, " And you've read chapters one and two and that's all you're going to read?"

" Correct," said Charles.

" And yet," said Sandys, beginning to draw elaborate flowers upon the table-cloth with the haft of a fork, " that book, which I consider the sloppiest piece of drivel that even E. L.-G.'s ever written, has been out exactly six weeks and has sold exactly sixty thousand copies. . . ."

This time it was Charles who interrupted: " Goin' to say," he said, " that if sixty thousand people read and presumably enjoy, the stuff must have merit?"

Sandys looked up quickly. " Exactly," he said. " I'm beginning to think, Fox-Browne, that it isn't the people that enjoy it that have got something the matter with them, but people like you and me and St. John Ervine."

Charles nodded but did not speak. There was silence while they finished their coffee and it was not until they were seated by the fire in the smallest and most comfortable of the many rooms of the club that the host broke this silence. He said suddenly, his gaze concentrated upon the cigar which he was cutting with care:

" Believe in ghosts?"

" No," said Charles.

" Why not?"

" Because," said Charles, " I don't believe much."

Now Sandys did look at him. " Do you find that useful?"

Charles nodded. He added, as a reluctant afterthought to the nod: " Why ask?"

There was an appreciable pause before Sandys answered. And when he did speak it was with a curious little shame-faced look. He said:

" It's like this. If you'd asked me a fortnight ago whether I believed in ghosts or the supernatural or anything you like to call it, I should have said no, but now I've spent ten days or so at Friar's Pardon I'm not so sure about the answer."

Charles settled himself more comfortably in his chair. " Go on," he said.

" I'm not sure that I will. I think I'll leave you to find out for yourself." Sandys smiled broadly. " You see, Fox-Browne, if you come down there and find . . . nothing, think how comforting that will be for nervous little boys like me."

He twisted round in his chair. " Now then, is there any information you'd like? I mean real information. No spook stuff. Information about the job or the people or anything?"

" Thanks," said Charles. " One or two things. Acreage? Number of farms?"

" With the house and its private grounds a thousand. Farms four," said Sandys. He produced from his breast pocket a long envelope. " You'd better take these papers. They'll show you tenants' names; divisions of land; all that sort of thing."

" Is Mrs. Lester-Greene the owner or tenant of Friar's Pardon?"

" Owner. She bought the whole estate from Edward Deaves, a gentleman, I might say, who was extremely glad to do a deal. I gather that he could have sold the park and farms a hundred times over but a curious streak of sentimentality or something had stopped him from separating these from that bugbear of a house. . . . Anything else?"

Charles, who had drawn several foolscap sheets from the long envelope and glanced over them, shook his head. " Thanks, no. Suppose I've met the whole family?"

Sandys shook his head. " You've seen E. L.-G. and Gladys, but there's E. L.-G's brother, Claude Lester. He seems to be installed at Friar's Pardon. And then, although she doesn't spend the whole of her time with us, there's Lesley Destrier. . . . But you did meet her, of course, this afternoon. And then, since you may as well know all the bones in the cupboard, there's a relative of sorts—a Mrs. Barratt—who is housekeeper. I believe she's a first cousin of E. L.-G's. I'm rather sorry for her in a way. She's a forbidding enough old creature, but she seems to be going to turn out neither servant nor family. She floats about in a sort of mid-world of her own. That, plus me, is the whole of the permanencies. When you come down—by the way, did I tell you E. L.-G. wants you to start on Friday if you can—when you come down, you'll find one or two guests. Lesley Destrier—she's sort of half guest and half family; seems to spend about seven months out of the twelve with E. L.-G. wherever she is; old Lady Maud Vassar and Trever Ignatius Pursell, eighth Baron Pursell of Mitcham. Lesley Destrier you've met; Maudie Vassar you are sure to have heard of! . . ."

Charles nodded. " Spooks?"

" That's right. More publicity, you see. ' Mrs. Lester-Greene's house party at Friar's Pardon includes Lady Maud Vassar and also Lord Pursell of Mitcham.' She's an oddity, but I think you'll find rather a charming old oddity Don't tell her whatever you do that you Don't Believe. Young Pursell is affable and almost more like a Wodehouse young man than one would believe possible . . . I say, have another brandy?"

" Thanks," said Charles, to add after the waiter had brought glasses: " Friday you said?"

" That's right. I should take the 8.30 from Victoria That'll get you down between half past ten and eleven. I'll send a car to meet you."

"Thanks," said Charles, and half-an-hour afterwards bade farewell to his host on the steps of the Oddities, refusing a lift in his host's taxi.

The night was clear and cold and fine. He walked up St. James's Street and from thence wound through the heart of Mayfair to the Marble Arch. He excluded from his mind all thoughts of Friday and the new work. Or nearly all thoughts. His mind was in reminiscent form that night, showing to the inside of his eyes a sort of disjointed but colourful cinematograph reel of his life, but occasionally the film was interrupted. . . . Were those eyes blue or were they green?

He read himself to sleep that night with the first three pages of the third chapter of *Paradise for Two*.

CHAPTER IV

DEN OF THE LIONESS

THE 10.47 pulled in to Deyning Water only two minutes behind its time. Charles, to-day in light-coloured well-worn tweeds, was superintending the removal of his baggage from the guard's van when a low-pitched, respectful and completely Cockney voice spoke at his shoulder, saying his name. He turned to find a short, stocky, bandy-legged person in a chauffeur's livery of bottle-green. From under the shining black visor of the cap there looked a round, red, clean-shaved face with snub nose and small twinkling brown eyes.

"I'm Morlas, sir," said the face. "Mrs. Lester-Greene's chuffure, sir." Charles's baggage was off the platform and through the booking-hall and into the boot of a long black Delage in a space of time which showed that in this servant at least, Enid Lester-Greene was lucky.

Charles tipped a porter who had done little but gape, and turned to find the near-side door of the car held open for him. He smiled and shook his head.

"Sit in front if I may," he said. "See the country."

The chauffeur smiled. It appeared from his face that he approved of Mr. Charles Fox-Browne.

The car, Charles seated in the seat next the driver's, purred almost silent way out of the station-yard, down a steep cobbled hill, beneath a single lichened railway arch and so came into the charming High Street of Deyning Water; a street which during the spring and summer months is thick with Kodak-clicking visitors, for there is not in the whole length of it a house of less than two hundred years of age.

At the end of the High Street there is the white railed green, the old pond in its centre, and the three inns, Hand and Flower, Red Lion and Compasses standing about it. At the green the car swung left; made cautious way through the tortuous little street known as Water Alley and came out, after dignified preliminary hooting, into the main Deyning-Learmouth Road. Once upon this broad, straight, macadam ribbon, Morlas accelerated. The needle upon the speedometer dial moved round with a smooth rush from fifteen to fifty-five. Morlas looked out of the corner of his eye at his passenger. His passenger appeared to be looking straight before him, but said, with a calm appositeness which made Morlas almost jump:

"Let her go if you want to. Like it."

Morlas grinned and his foot went down. Before he was compelled to slack for his turning, the needle had touched seventy-five. They came, the car now at a steady twenty, to a small crossroad. They took the turning to the left. At the corner was a finger-post newly painted. It had two arms to it. The top arm read:

Ocklesham 2
Ferriers 3½

The lower arm read:

Friar's Pardon 6¾
Straight after Ocklesham.

This road was narrow and none too well surfaced and twisted this way and that with such frequent avoidance of travellers' convenience that Charles found in his head the refrain of Dalroy's version of the *Road to Roundabout*. Speed of anything greater than twenty miles an hour was impossible.

"Do we," said Charles suddenly, "pass any of the Friar's Pardon land this way?"

The chauffeur shook his head. "No, sir, that's all t'other side of the 'ouse like."

"Thanks,' said Charles.

The car went steadily on. The twisting road mounted. Upon each side of it were high, bare hedgerows, half concealing and half revealing pasture fields enclosed not by other hedgerows but by dykes.

Before them all the time, though sometimes with the curves of the road seeming to swing as if pivoted, the horizon was brought near by the line of the Downs—great swelling domes reaching in a line unbroken but of uneven height to the east and west. With a final twist the road seemed to shake itself and lie suddenly, still mounting, as a straight grey line before them. The hedgerows gave way upon the left hand side to the grey-fenced border of a thick copse. Upon the right the hedgerow continued. And so they came at the top of this first hill to the little village of Ocklesham. A small hamlet of two prosperous-seeming, well-gardened houses, fifteen or twenty cottages, a pond, a green, two unpainted inn signs and a smithy.

Past Ocklesham the road dropped suddenly again;

ran down and took them down into a small valley, over a narrow stone bridge and so to the foot of Wester Down itself. Here the road broadened, the hedgerows departed and the green pasture land of the Down's foot lay open to Charles's eye.

"It's a long ways up this side 'ere, sir," Morlas said. "T'other side, 'owsomever, that's very different-like. It goes down sudden like in terrisses. Seems some'ow that you get down to ground level like a lot quicker."

"Thanks," said Charles. He had been wondering how it was that if Friar's Pardon, whose outline he could now faintly see at the top of the Down, stood in this position, it could manage to hold four farms within its thousand acres, because this side of the Down, save for indifferent and casual grazing, was no farm land.

As the big car mounted, the pale November sun which for three days now had been doing its cheerful best, grew less and less as the faint mist which shrouded the Down grew denser, but still with every hundred yards Charles could see clearer the outline, stern and yet graceful, of the house called Friar's Pardon.

Friar's Pardon had been built at the very end of the seventeenth century (to be exact the last stone had been laid upon the twenty-first of October, 1699) by Sir Roger Westmacott; and Sir Roger, then one of the richest men in the south, had had as his architect Sir John Vanbrugh. That it was Vanbrugh's work Charles had no idea but was, nevertheless, reminded in some dim vague way of Oxford. This reminiscence, although he did not realise it until many days later, was caused by the fact that Friar's Pardon, designed and built in 1699, was a foreshadowing in little of Blenheim Palace, which Vanbrugh designed six years later. It is not meant that the lines even were similar, and certainly there was no relation in size between the two buildings, but here in Friar's Pardon was the same grace-

ful balance, the same two turretted wings, the same unifying, heavily-porticoed entrance.

You came upon Friar's Pardon suddenly, although you had perforce been seeing its back for the whole ascent of Wester Down. This may seem paradoxical but is nevertheless true; it would perhaps be clearer to say that you came fully up to the house and round it to the great gates and the circular sweep of gravel drive long before you expected to.

Through the gates Morlas swung the car and then drove left-handed round the drive and pulled to a gentle stop immediately at the foot of the steps leading up to the pillared door of iron studded oak.

Charles descended, and the first thing he did was to walk round the car until he stood, his right side half to the house, looking to the south-east. He could not see from where he stood all that he wanted to see. Characteristically he left car and chauffeur and a front door now opened and walked, with his long, slightly rolling stride, nearly to the end of the eastern wing. He halted. Now he could see. And he saw, at once, what Morlas meant, for this side of Wester Down was as different as might be from the other. It did go down in terraces, and, starting with the third terrace, it began to look like farm-land; was indeed farm-land and rich farm-land. To Charles's eye, for the past three years so used to a wooded, gently-rolling country, this flat checkerboard which lay beneath him was with his first glance a disappointment, but after a moment began with a gentle but increasingly solid persistence to push in upon the onlooker its own claims.

For perhaps two minutes Charles stood where he was, then swung upon his heel and went back to the car and the main door. As he walked back, his eye had time to take in the gardens. These, too, were terraced but slightly and by the hand of man. They also

gave signs of newness, as well indeed they might when he thought of the time which had elapsed between the leaving of the last tenant and the place's purchase by his employer. But although new, they had still sufficient traces of the old to combine, somehow very pleasantly, the promise of new beauty to come with the shadow of beauty past.

Already Morlas had all the luggage out and at the top of the steps, where he now stood talking to an elderly man servant. Charles took the eight steps two at a time. He slipped half a crown into the ready hand of the chauffeur and took stock of the butler.

This was a man of perhaps fifty years with the authentic bald head but none of the authentic plumpness. A man, in fact, exceedingly lean, with a sharp-edged, big-nosed face. When he spoke his voice was deep and sonorous like a pompous cleric's.

"Good-morning, sir, he said. "Mr. Fox-Browne, I understand. "I'm Seton, Mrs. Lester-Greene's butler."

"Yes," said Charles.

"Mrs. Lester-Greene," Seton said pontifically, "has ordered me, sir, to say that she will not be down before luncheon. Perhaps, sir, you would like me to show you to your room. It is in the west wing, sir. I will have your luggage taken up immediately."

"Thanks," said Charles. And presently, after mounting the broad staircase of polished, uncarpeted oak—the finest staircase, he thought, that he had ever mounted—and traversing what seemed an incredible number of yards of softly carpeted corridor, he was left by Seton in a room, windowed upon its northern and western sides which looked out upon a county and a half. He could imagine that looking out of the western window upon a clear day he might see the sea.

The room was large, and furnished with admirable regard to comfort and eye. In a wide fireplace a log

fire blazed with many colours. Charles, looking about him, felt his mouth twist into a smile at the thought of the reputation which this house had gathered about itself; a reputation which would be so carefully enhanced by his employer. Anything less like in appearance or atmosphere to the haunted grange of the spook seekers he could not imagine.

There were two doors to the room, the one by which he had entered and one which he found to lead to a small but more than completely appointed bathroom.

He washed and then imagined necessity for a cleaner collar. He wondered how long his luggage would be but ceased so to wonder almost as soon as he had begun. There came a tap upon the door and at his word there entered, backwards, a long and lanky but strongly built boy enveloped in an apron of green baize. This boy was attached to one end of Charles's trunk; the other end was borne by a fresh faced housemaid in print dress and much bestarched cuffs and cap.

Following her came another girl similarly dressed; a much bigger girl, carrying, as easily as a man would carry, two large suitcases, one in either hand. Still shuffling backwards, the boy turned his head over his shoulder and looked up at Charles in mute inquiry.

"Anywhere," Charles said. "Here if you like."

Between them, the boy and the girl lowered the heavy trunk gently to the ground between dressing-table and bed's foot.

"And these, sir?" said the second girl. She stood close by her colleague; she stood unbowed by the weight of the heavy cases. They dangled from her hands as if they had been toys.

"Do where they are, thanks," said Charles. And she set them down. The Boots—Charles was to learn soon that his surname was Rogers but that he answered more readily to the sound of Fred—stood upright,

dabbed a fairly clean forefinger at his forehead and made for the door, closely followed by his assistant with the trunk. Charles looked at the young giantess who stood for a moment before following her companions and cast an efficient and comprehensive glance about the room to see that all was as it should be. What he saw was a frame Olympian in size and excellent in proportion, topped by a face which would have done justice to some Byzantine coin. Under the edges of the white starched cap there showed bands of jet black hair. He cast a swift, unobtrusive glance at the hands to find them a jarring note in the design, for they were the big, powerful, ugly, rough-skinned hands of the maid-of-all-work. After the glance, she too turned towards the door. It stood open, Fred and her fluffy little colleague having just passed through it.

Charles, thinking of the clean collar, stopped and snapped back the locks of his trunk, raising its heavy metal-lined lid. As this reached the perpendicular, it slipped from his fingers to fall with a dull but loud and metallic thud upon the carpet.

"Damn!" said Charles and then immediately straightened himself. There crossed his face a momentary expression of astonishment. From just without his door there had come a stifled feminine shriek; not a playful shriek; but a sound of pure terror. He was at the doorway in two noiseless and catlike jumps. He went through the doorway with a half stride to see, not three feet from him, the ungainly figure of Fred stooping over a limp bundle of print which lay half crouched, half huddled upon the floor against the corridor wall. Towering over this group there stood, impassive, the Juno like figure of the girl whom he was shortly to know as Gertrude Fenner. He took a step forward.

"What's up?" he said. "Fainted?"

Fred straightened himself with a jerk. "N-n-n-n-

no. . . ." Alternately crimson and grey-white about the gills, he gave up speech as a bad job. With a mute and servile jerk of his untidy head, he indicated the silent, somehow contemptuous, figure beside him. Charles, his face once more an expressionless mask, turned his head.

" It's nothing, sir," said Juno. " Nothing at all. Agnes is as nervous as a cat. Something must have frightened her. Perhaps it was that noise when you dropped something."

The inert Agnes was suddenly revivified. She scrambled to her feet and stood, clenched hands pressed to her now hotly flushed cheeks, looking alternately at the ground and up at Charles's face. Her lips moved as if she were going to speak but no sound came from them.

" All right now?" said Charles.

The white-capped head was nodded with almost comic emphasis. From underneath the cap a fuzzy whisp of sandy hair had strayed.

" Good," said Charles. He smiled a friendly and semi-paternal smile. He turned on his heel and went back into his room, leaving the door open. From behind him there came a small attention-drawing cough. He turned to see Juno just within the doorway and already closing the door behind her.

" Excuse me, sir," she said, " I just wanted to say that if so be as you'd like your things put away, I could attend to them in about ten minutes."

Charles looked at her. " Thank you," he said, and then: " What's the matter with the girl?"

The dark handsome face, whose eyes returned his gaze steadily, was expressionless as his own. " Nothing, sir," said the level voice. " Nothing at all. Agnes is very highly strung. And she's been off colour

lately. . . . If that's all, sir, I'll go and come back in ten minutes to set your things away."

"Thanks," said Charles. He bent once more over his trunk in search of the collar. When, having found it, he straightened, it was to see the door closing and to find himself alone. A broad smile, broader than most of his acquaintances had ever seen, spread over his face, touching his eyes and closing them to slits. He thought: Odd house. Odd people. Everything odd!

He changed collars rapidly and, leaving the room, made his way down the long corridor of the west wing to the stairhead. At the head of the stairs he stopped, looking back along the way he had come. He thought he had heard the sound of an opening door, but apparently his ears had misled him. He went downstairs. He intended to find a servant and ask for Sandys but was saved the trouble. The man himself, looking up and smiling, was standing before the vast open fireplace in the hall.

CHAPTER V

INFIDEL

"AND this," said Sandys, as they came back into the hall from an inspection of the drawing-room, sun-room and billiard-room which composed the ground floor of the eastern wing, "is my office." Once more the half-secret and very merry smile came into his dark eyes. "E. L.-G. calls it my den. I prefer office myself."

He indicated a small door set into the panelling of the hall. If you stood with your back to this doorway, you had the stairs directly upon your right hand, while, diagonally to your left, were the glass doors to the lobby and main entrance door of the house. Facing you across the expanse of the great hall, were the double doors to the dining-room. Behind the dining-room, as

Sandys explained, were the servants' hall and kitchens and larders.

Sandys pressed down the handle of his office door, opened it and stood aside to let Charles walk in. It was a room narrow and long, barely but pleasantly furnished and having its whole southern wall, which was cut into a bay, windowed. French windows were in the centre of the bay and the angled windows at the side were high casements. Round the inner side of the bay ran an oak window seat. Just inside the bay was a large office table with two telephones upon it and a number of tidily ordered papers.

" That's mine," said Sandys. " I'm afraid, Fox-Browne, until they've got another room ready for you, you'll have to share this as far as your office work goes. I've put a table there for you." He pointed to the other end of the room where was a smaller but similar table also with a swing chair but with no telephone. " And you can use that filing cabinet beside it as you want. I've cleared it out for you. If you want to telephone, that ordinary two-hand instrument on my table's the main. The single-hand instrument is just a private line from the study upstairs. These other filing cabinets "—he pointed to the wall opposite the fireplace —" are all my stuff. The two easy-chairs "—he pointed to where they stood, one upon each side of the crackling fire—" you can have for your own use. I never get time to use either of them. Have a cigarette?" He took a slim, gold case from his hip pocket and held it open.

" Pipe," said Charles, " if allowed?"

Sandys laughed. " One thing about this house, you can smoke yourself dry with any sort of tobacco anywhere. E. L.-G. herself smokes the filthiest gaspers under the sun at the rate of about sixty a day. Also, you'll be popular if you smoke a pipe, more especially

if you wear tweeds. In fact, my lad, you've only got to carry a thick ash plant, have a shapeless felt hat and you might have stepped straight out of our current piece *Kismet and Drusilla.*"

Charles, his half smile twisting his mouth, filled his pipe in silence. A knock came upon the door; a loud peremptory knock. Charles, a match-flame held to his pipe-bowl, noticed that Sandys, who had his back to the door, visibly started and then swung round with a haste and action incompatible with the controlled and ordinary voice in which a second later he said: " Come in."

The door was opened violently and a man strode in, slamming it behind him. As he entered Charles was on his left and Sandys immediately facing him. He did not see Charles. He said to Sandys, almost shouting:

" Damn it all, man! Did you or did you not arrange that I could have half an hour with Enid this morning. Just been up there and the damned door's locked and all she'll say is ' Go away, I'm busy. Go away, I'm busy ' like a bloody parrot. What I . . ."

Sandys, with a suave insistence which Charles admired, cut short the flow. He said:

" Just a minute, Lester. Just a minute, Here's Mr. Fox-Browne who's going to look after the Friar's Pardon land."

" Eh!" said the newcomer. " Eh! What's that!" He turned sharply and faced Charles, surveying him from top to toe with a quick, curiously bird-like glance. He was a lean, erect, jerky person with hot brown eyes encircled by malarially-yellow whites. He had a hollow-cheeked, yellow face with, under the short nose, a neat smudge of very black moustache. His mouth seemed inordinately full of very white teeth, irregularly shaped and all too large. He was dressed in neat, dark clothes, admirably if a little too tightly cut. He was,

if anything, barely of middle height but his erectness of carriage and extreme leanness combined to give him the air of a tall man. After his greeting he held out his hand. He smiled broadly with the tooth-filled mouth, but the smile did not seem to touch his eyes. " How d'ye do," he said. He took a step forward still with hand out-stretched and Charles clasped this hand with his own to feel a shake of surprising and sinewy vigour.

" Well," said Charles. " And you?"

" Fit. Fit. Bad tempered though. I'm sorry. I'm afraid it's my Nepal liver. Sorry I burst in like that, but I'd been a bit put out. I'd arranged to see my sister on business this morning and there she is, writing away at one of her stories. . . . Still, mustn't grumble . . . Got a cigarette, Sandys?"

Once more Sandys extracted his case. Charles, watching, saw that the hand reached out towards the case was far from steady. Sandys struck a match and offered it. He said, looking at Charles:

" I'm afraid I didn't introduce you properly. This is Major Claude Lester, Mrs. Lester-Greene's brother."

" And," said Lester crossing the room and dropping into one of the leather chairs, " the black sheep of the family, what?" He put his head back and laughed—a hearty, neighing sound with little merriment in it. He jerked himself to his feet and began to pace the room—evidently an unrestful person. With a sudden impatient gesture, he plucked the barely started cigarette from his mouth and hurled it across the room into the fire. He turned to Sandys and when he spoke there was once more in his voice the harsh, grating note which it had held during the outburst following his entrance.

" This damn place!" he said. " It's getting on my nerves."

Charles, watching the two men from behind the pale screen of smoke from his pipe, saw Sandys, before he

smiled, frown and cast an anxious look towards the windows, the left hand of which stood open a little way.

" Don't talk so loud!" said Sandys sharply and then: " Sorry, Lester, I thought I heard somebody walking about outside. . . . Yes, I did." And as he spoke there passed the window, with her head turned to look out over the gardens at the rolling farm-lands below, Lesley Destrier. She had on a tweed coat and skirt of charming pattern and better line. Her head was bare and her hair glinted in the pale sunshine which now had dissolved the last traces of mist.

Charles, to his complete astonishment, felt a sudden emotion for which he chid himself. He resented these uncalled for, sixteen-year-old reactions. Unusually, he started a conversation: He said:

" You aren't the only one, Major Lester." And was then amazed, although he didn't show it, at the reception of this remark. Both men, who had been standing edge-ways to him wheeled round to face him.

" What's that you say," said Sandys. And Lester: ' What the devil d'you mean."

Charles looked at them with a calm which he felt must be irritating but might be salutary. " Nothing much," he said. " Only just now, after she'd brought my luggage upstairs, one of the maids did a scream and a half faint because I dropped the lid of a trunk."

Lester muttered something under his breath. He went on looking at Charles with his hot brown eyes which now were fixed in an unwinking stare. But Sandys had recovered normal poise. He said:

" You mustn't take any notice of us, Fox-Browne. What sort of a girl was it? Tall, dark, handsome thing like Cleopatra?"

Charles shook his head. " She was unmoved. It was her lieutenant. Fluffy; red-faced. Name Agnes."

" Oh," said Sandys. " Yes. Agnes Hicks. She and

Cleo—that's Gertrude Fenner in this incarnation—are housemaids. Say she fainted?"

"Hardly," said Charles. "Squawked. Gave at the knees. All right in a second. Odd though."

It was Lester's turn to speak. He spoke neither at Charles nor at Sandys, but as if he were talking to himself. "There you are!" he said upon a note of resigned but nervous triumph. "What did I tell everybody! What did I tell Enid! I said to Enid: 'My dear girl, what with this place and its story *plus* all the copy you're going to make out of the story, you won't have a single servant after three months'. That's what I said to Enid. And she stuck on one of her Catherine of Russia airs and flatly contradicted me. I said to her: 'Look here, Enid, you mark my words I'm right!' And by Gad! events are proving I'm right." He turned his gaze back to Charles. "D'you know, sir, the house has been fully occupied about six weeks. During that time my sister's lost two parlourmaids, one housemaid and two cooks. Now she's doubled their beastly wages, which were far too high already, and hopes to keep this lot like that. But she won't, sir, she won't! She might have had a chance if she'd kept the east wing locked up instead of shifting herself into it and blaring about the place how she's not afraid of God or Man or Devil. Or if she'd stop this pooh-poohing of all the stories that people tell her. . . ."

Sandys interrupted: "All right, Lester. All right. I don't know whether it's occurred to you, but the best thing we can do is to let Fox-Browne gather his own impressions. As I said to him at dinner the other night, if he gets nothing it might be a great comfort to some of us, if not all. . . . Tell you what, let's all go and have a drink."

"That," said Lester, "is the first intelligent word I've heard spoken in this house this morning. Come on,

Fox-Browne. I'll say this for Enid, she's got some of the best sherry in England."

They had their sherry in the billiard room; an apartment which, starting at the far end of the ground floor of the east wing, occupied this wholly for the half of its length. This was a room of which Enid Lester-Greene, who had insisted upon the alterations necessary to produce it, was particularly proud. In it, Charles made the acquaintance of the remaining members of the house party, for there, listlessly playing a hundred up against himself, was Lord Pursell. And there too, seated in a high-backed, winged arm-chair with her white head leaning against a cushion and her incredibly frail, blue-veined white hands draped one over each of the arms of the chair, was Lady Maud Vassar. And there too—Charles having himself now well under control was prepared to believe that this did not matter to him—was Lesley Destrier. She sat on a low chair by the fire. Her tweed coat was off, to show by its absence a high-necked blouse of white silk. She looked, he thought, still steeling himself against any sort of emotion, tired and tired out. Her face was very pale and there were dark half circles, nearly black, beneath the eyes of which it was impossible to tell the colour.

Sandys introduced him. He bowed to Lady Maud Vassar who, at the introduction, opened a pair of astonishingly large hazel eyes which seemed to look straight through him, smiled, and once more closed their heavy white lids over the eyes.

Sandys said: "You've met Mrs. Destrier, haven't you?" And once more Charles bowed.

Looking up from her low chair, Lesley Destrier smiled. Her smile, though it lighted up her queer beauty, did nothing to lessen her look of fatigue. She did not speak.

Upon the other hand, Trevor Ignatius Pursell, eighth Baron of Mitcham, would not stop speaking. He was a

young and tall and well-built person, loosely and appropriately and beautifully clothed, of twenty-five years of age. His face might have served, with or without its monocle, for the jacket of any one of Mr. Wodehouse's *Jeeves* books. You expected to come from his face, with its rather cod-like mouth, a high-pitched and slightly petulant voice, and were accordingly surprised, as indeed was Charles, when there came a deep and round and beautiful baritone. He said, seizing Charles's hand and shaking it:

" Damn glad to see you. Do you play billiards? I'm very fond of the game, but I can't get any one here to play with me. I say, I hope you do play billiards. I don't think there's anything better a chap can do than to play billiards if he isn't going out, do you? Do tell me you play billiards. If you tell me you don't play billiards I'm liable to give out a kind of sobbing gasp and swoon at your feet. You know you look like the sort of fellow that does play billiards. If you are, have another glass of sherry and play me a hundred or even fifty."

Charles smiled. " Billiards," he said, " are my middle name. Don't know if I can play with you now though. I'm not a guest. I'm here to work."

" My dear chap," Sandys cut in, ' you can't possibly work this morning and anyway E. L.-G. wanted me to keep you in the house until she'd seen you."

" The Lord," said Lord Pursell, " be praised!"

Charles, who secretly prided himself upon his game, found himself with a nut which it was impossible for him to crack. The first hundred up was very quickly over, Pursell running out with a break of fifty-five.

" Have at you!" said Charles. " Two hundred?"

" Och aye!" His companion's mouth stretched itself in a smile which threatened to sever his head.

This, with Charles on his game and Pursell not play-

ing so well, was a longer affair. It finished, however, with Pursell as the winner, but only by a short head. Returning their cues to the rack, they found—or thought that they had found—the room to be empty.

Pursell looked at his watch. "Quarter of an hour and then lunch. What about another?" He walked over to the small table upon which stood the sherry decanter and glasses. Charles followed him. "Here's how!" said the Eighth Baron of Mitcham.

"*Skol!*" said Charles.

They stood by the table, each man in his own way enjoying this wine which was quite possibly, as Claude Lester had said, the best of its kind in England.

"I say," said Pursell, his chinless face assorting oddly with the sudden gravity of his spaniel-like brown eyes and the deep rich notes of his voice. "I say! I wonder what you're going to think of this place?"

Charles was silent, sipping at his sherry.

'Because, you know," continued Pursell, "this is a damn odd, funny sort of place, this is. Queerish, if you know what I mean. I mean, to look at me, you wouldn't think I was a fanciful, imaginative sort of a bloke, would you?"

"No," said Charles.

"You'd be right. So if I was to tell you that although I'm *not* a fanciful, imaginative sort of bloke—or anything like one—I fully subscribe to the opinion that this is a damn odd, peculiar, queerish sort of house, you'd be inclined to believe that there was something damn odd, peculiar and queerish about it, wouldn't you?"

"Must," said Charles, "have notice of that question.'

Pursell laughed; then on the instant grew grave again.

"What would you say, Fox-Browne, if every day when you went up to your room you found something had changed places with something else?"

" Nothing."

" What do you mean, nothing?"

Charles smiled. " I should say nothing. I'd hang about until I caught the person that was shiftin' 'em."

" Very nice," said Pursell, " and quick and all that; also very full of shrewd common sense and *savoir faire*! But suppose, my lad "—he leaned forward and tapped impressively upon Charles's forearm—" you tried to put this brilliant scheme into operation and found it didn't work?"

" Go on," said Charles.

Pursell spread his hands. " Well, what would you do then?" His voice was plaintive.

" What I'll do now," Charles said, " is to say be lucid. Example, please."

" Come to the fire," Pursell said. He refilled his glass and led the way across the room to the big fireplace with its circle of chairs. Charles followed him. Pursell, arrived at the fire, turned to find himself looking straight at the still, fragile figure of Maud Vassar. She sat where she had been sitting when Charles had entered the room. Her eyes were closed and yet, somehow, it was clear that she did not sleep.

" Oh, hell!" said Purcell under his breath, and then added with loud heartiness: " I say, I'm so sorry! I didn't know you were here."

For a fleeting second the heavy white lids raised themselves to show the hazel eyes sparkling with something that may have been laughter. " My dear Trevor," said the old lady in a voice clear and high pitched and as youthful as if she had been a girl of twenty-one. " My dear Trevor, surely you and Mr. . . . Mr. . . . Fox-Browne have as much right in this room as I. Trevor, compose yourself and please continue with your conversation. It interests me."

"I say, dash it!" Pursell's voice was the voice of a bashful schoolboy. "I say!"

"You were, I believe," said the old lady, this time without opening her eyes, "telling Mr. Fox-Browne of certain phenomena which had taken place in your bedroom in this house. . . . I'm sorry, Trevor, if you think I've been eavesdropping, but really you've got a very loud voice."

"Oh!" said Pursell.

Charles came to the rescue. He said:

"I think, Lady Maud, that Lord Pursell was going to tell me that he'd had some sort of *poltergeist*. . . ."

The old lady's eyes opened fully wide this time. They looked up at Charles with a sudden blaze of interest. "*Poltergeist!*" she said interrupting. "*Poltergeist!* Mr. Fox-Browne, are you by any chance interested in the Occult?"

"Damn!" said Charles to himself. Audibly, he said: "I do not see, Lady Maud, how any one can fail to be interested in anything beyond the range of their experience." He flattered himself as the words left his mouth that he had got well out of this tight corner.

But the old lady was not deceived. Once more the heavy eyelids rolled down over the strange eyes. When she spoke her voice was different indeed from the full-bodied tone with which she had shot at him her last question.

"Oh!" she said. "I see. You are not, Mr. Fox-Browne, a Believer?"

One good turn deserves another, thought Lord Pursell of Mitcham. He plunged in, although somewhat ungainly, to his new friend's help. He said, with a determined, here-we-are-all-friends-together sort of voice:

"What I was going to tell Fox-Browne was that I really could *not* understand how it was that something kept shifting things about in my room. I've as jolly

near proved that it can't be one of the servants as a man can prove anything, and yet it still goes on. D'you know, last night, for instance, when I got up to bed, damn'd if I could find my pyjamas. Most 'strordinary thing. Hunted here; hunted there; got on my tummy and looked under the bed. Climbed on a chair and looked on top of the wardrobe. Looked in all the drawers; looked *in* the wardrobe; looked in the linen basket. Damn it, I looked everywhere! When I got tired and hottish and quite considerably peeved, I came downstairs to look for somebody who'd do something about it. It was a bit latish and I couldn't find a soul. More peeved than ever, I went upstairs, thinking I'd have to sleep in my shirt or something or nothing. But bless my blinking eyes, when I got into the room, first thing I saw was the gent's natty sleeping suit all laid out nice and tidy on the bed." Having warmed to his recital, Pursell had now forgotten all embarrassment. He turned to Charles "*There!* What you make of that!"

Charles, having abandoned the idea of persuading this very shrewd old lady that he was sympathetic to the ruling passion of her life, found easy answer. "Nothing at all," he said with a smile which took the edge off his words. "Some one had taken your pyjamas for some purpose or the other before you went into your room the first time. While you were out of it they put the pyjamas back."

Once more the head of Lord Pursell was almost divided by his smile. He advanced a step and tapped Charles upon the chest. "A-ha!" he said. "That, my bonny blue-eyed bouncing boy, is just exactly what nobody did do. 'Because, why?' say you. And echo makes answer, because they blooming well couldn't have, 'cos little Trevor locked his door when he went downstairs, and put the key in his little dressing-

gown pocket and when he went back, he unlocked the door with his little key and went in again."

Once more the eyes of the old lady opened fully. They looked at Charles. They had in them a gleam of amusement, not without malice. "Yes, Mr. Fox-Browne," she said softly. "What does common sense make of that?"

"Common sense," said Charles, "would like notice of that question. If you like, Lady Maud, I'll seek you out later and tell you."

The old lady looked at Pursell. "You see, Trevor," she said, and her left eyelid descended in the slightest of winks, "We've already an investigator in the house. Alas for my poor theories. My cherished beliefs will be slain by Mr. Fox-Browne." Once more she turned to Charles. "And supposing, Mr. Fox-Browne," she said, "that after all you are unable to find a *rational* explanation of this affair of Trevor's pyjamas or the thousand and one other matters that probably will be brought to your notice? What then?"

Charles extricated himself. He bowed. He said gently: "Then I shall come to you and ask for enlightenment."

The old lady let her head drop back against its cushion She said, smiling: "Your manners, at least, are charming."

From somewhere within the house came the deep booming note of a gong.

"The Lord" said Lord Pursell, "be praised! I can now separate my stomach from my back-bone."

CHAPTER VI

STORM OVER COFFEE

THE three arrived in the hall, Lady Maud leading, Pursell close behind and Charles a slow third, to find the

rest of the company clustered about the hearth. In the centre of the group, there towered—or seemed to tower—the figure of Enid Lester-Greene. To Charles, who had hitherto only seen her with hat, she took on suddenly a new significance. Instead of the pompous, rather dough-like grandiosity which he remembered, he saw what at first glance seemed an almost beautiful woman of late middle-age. This morning, Enid Lester-Greene was dressed in a severe and most cunningly fashioned gown of black. Round the edges of its high collar—she was one of those rare women who know when their necks should be covered—and at the cuffs of the long, tight sleeves, were touches of plain but dazzling white. She wore no ornament save—and once again Charles found them a jarring note—two pendulous earrings, over-long. In the be-ringed fingers of her right hand was an amber cigarette holder, its half-smoked contents sending up a clear, pale spiral into the warm air. Her silver hair, dressed with a neat and most ingenious artistry, lent to the otherwise severe figure a touch of genuine and gentle beauty. She was talking in low voice with Sandys, who stood at her right hand. To her left, in a small and, to Charles's mind, ominously silent group, stood Lesley Destrier, Claude Lester and Gladys Lester-Greene. In contrast to her mother, Gladys was clad in the most aggressive of "country tweeds"—a coat and skirt of violent brown checks against a background which was unalloyed mustard, and stockings of insistent pattern. But she seemed in this garb, though it fitted her well enough and was beyond the offensive stage of newness, like a fish out of water.

The conversation between Sandys and his employer was cut short. Enid Lester-Greene came forward with one of her smooth rushes which were so like the surge of a galleon in full sail that Charles felt instinctively that

this simile must have occurred to the woman herself. She said to Maud Vassar:

"Good-morning! I *do* hope that you slept! And you *must* forgive me for not having seen you till now! But, my dear, I've been *so* busy!"

From the back of the old lady's head as it nodded in acknowledgment of these fulsomenesses, Charles sensed the look which he knew was upon her face—a look of tolerant and semi-acidulated humour. She said:

"My dear, of course I slept. Equally, although I should very much have liked to see you, I have been happy in this delightful house."

The hostess became, now, the friendly-no-nonsense-about-mistress-and-servant-here employer. She came to Charles with hand outstretched.

"Welcome," she said, "to Friar's Pardon!"

Charles, masking emotions behind a face more than usually skull-like, shook the hand. He made appropriate noises in his throat.

"So rude of me," said Enid Lester-Greene. "But, as I was just telling Lady Maud, I really have been up to my eyes." She turned and seemed to sweep up the company upon her glance. "Shall we go in?" she said. And from nowhere appeared the lean form of the butler Seton to throw open the double doors to the dining-room.

At the oval table, Charles found himself seated between Lady Maud on his right and Lesley Destrier on his left. Facing these three were Pursell opposite Lady Maud, Gladys Lester-Greene directly opposite Charles and Sandys opposite Lesley Destrier. At the head of the table, upon Charles's right—was his hostess and employer. At the foot of the table was Claude Lester.

The meal was slight but of sufficient substance. Its cooking was admirable to the point of genius and there

was a Liefraumilch of 1921 which showed that the worth of the sherry had not been accidental.

There was, during the first three-quarters of the meal, enough—but only just enough—conversation. And mostly it was supplied by Sandys. Charles was as silent as the woman upon his left; the woman at whom, for some reason into which he dared not too closely pry, he could not bring himself to look at. Upon his right, Maud Vassar, eating hardly at all and drinking nothing, sat wordless and motionless, her eyes staring straight across the table and into distant and non-existent places. At the foot of the table, Claude Lester seemed absorbed in the excellences of his sister's table. The girl Gladys, eating less even than Lady Maud, crumbled bread and stared down into a succession of plates, while Pursell did gallant but not too effectual best to deal with the asides of his hostess; asides which, from her demeanour, occasionally verged upon the arch. Sandys, however—and Charles admired him—talked and talked well.

But even a man who is talking for his own enjoyment—and this, Charles felt, Sandys was not doing—cannot go on for ever. And just before coffee, Sandys dried up. There was, Enid Lester-Greene having, temporarily at least, given up poor Pursell, a silence which, though at first pleasant enough, grew by rapid and irrationally increasing leaps, acutely discomfortable.

Charles, as the newcomer to the board, felt pleasantly aware through his discomfort that to break the silence could not be his affair. Covertly he watched the others, to find that all were patently uncomfortable save the hostess but that she apparently had not yet noticed the strain. There was a look in her prominent eyes which he had seen there before, the slightly glazed look with which she had turned to Sandys in the room at the Savoy while she had dictated notes to him. She looked

straight down the table towards her brother, but obviously saw him not.

The breaking of the silence came from a quarter which, to Charles at least, was utterly unexpected. Gladys Lester-Greene flung herself suddenly back in her chair. "If some one," she said, in a high-pitched unnatural voice with a quavering note of laughter or something else behind it, "doesn't say something in half a minute, I shall scream!"

The mother came out of her trance. "My dear," she said, on a note admirably mingling maternal love, social reproof and kindly concern, "Whatever . . ."

"Sorry," said Gladys. "Sorry." The rudeness of her tone denied the apology. "It must be the damn house!"

The silence, before the hostess had done more than look with reproachful eyes at her only child, was filled by what, in contrast with the previous quiet, was babel. Every one, and all at once, began talking.

Seton appeared at his mistress's elbow. "Will you take coffee here, Madam?" said Seton, "or in the drawing-room?"

"Here! Here!" snapped Enid. "And, Seton, please don't leave the door open behind me. There's quite a draught."

From beside him Charles heard a small hissing gasp as Lesley Destrier drew in her breath. He looked round at her sharply to see that her eyes were fixed upon the big double doors that led into the hall. The left-hand leaf of these doors stood ajar. Charles was astonished to see that the pallor which had shocked him earlier in the morning was now intensified. The eyes seemed dark wells. One long slim hand which rested upon the table was clenched into a fist whose little knuckles showed startlingly white.

The voice of the girl Gladys suddenly rose high

above the chatter. It said, once more on its high-pitched, unnatural note:

"That's funny, isn't it! Damn funny! Listen to me laughing! Seton hadn't been anywhere near that door. Not for the whole of lunch. And it was shut when we sat down."

The chatter stilled itself. Into the clear, heavy silence which followed it, the high-pitched and calm voice of Maud Vassar cut like a silver sword. It said:

"It was opened."

Even to Charles's sceptical and—apart from its preoccupation with Lesley Destrier and her obvious unease—amused mind, there was a certain impressiveness not altogether pleasant about the three simple words and the odd convinced and convincing calm with which they had been spoken. Having broken the silence they created another. Through it Charles could sense rather than hear the heavy, fear-laden breathing of the white-faced woman upon his left.

Enid Lester-Greene stared at her daughter. Her small eyes were charged with blue and angry fire. She said, in a voice which until now Charles had never heard her use:

"Gladys, I do not want to have to speak to you about this sort of thing again!" That was all, but the tone said far more. The glance of the small eyes left the sullen sallowness of the girl and, travelling round the table, conveyed a message to the other two women.

Seton held open the door. Going out in the wake of the men, Charles took unobtrusive stock of him. Seton's face was impassive. He looked, as usual, like a bored vulture, but if Charles were not mistaken, there was less blood than usual beneath the skin stretched so tautly over the cheek bones.

In the wake of the procession, Charles crossed the hall to the corridor of the eastern wing, at the end of

which was the billiard room and upon whose left the drawing-room. Before entering the drawing-room, something made him halt and turn to look back along the way he had come. He saw Seton standing, a cameoed figure in the centre of the hall: he was not looking towards the drawing-room but straight across to the fireplace. There was something in his completely immobile stance which gave Charles, as surely as if he had been able to see the man's eyes, a certainty that these were not seeing whatever material thing it was at which they looked.

Charles, with a little grunt, turned again and entered the drawing-room. It was perhaps half the size of the dining room. Nevertheless, it seemed large almost to the point of vastness. The whole of the party were gathered before the fire. They were all standing. They seemed to Charles, suddenly, like a group of indifferently modelled wax works, so little semblance, for that moment at least in which he entered, did they bear to real human shapes.

He closed the door behind him with an intentionally loud click. The sound revivified the group. It was as if a discomfortable enchantment had been removed. There was general movement. By the time Charles had crossed to the fireplace, all were seated except Enid Lester-Greene and young Pursell. But still—as if the magician had removed only half the spell—there were no voices. The hostess, true, opened her mouth as if to speak, but before words could come, the door opened and Seton entered. His mistress shut her mouth again with an audible snap. Seton carried a small table to the centre of the group. In his wake there fluttered, bearing a tray upon which were coffee cups and pot, the slim, slight, tow-headed parlourmaid who had waited at luncheon.

His mistress waved an imperious finger and Seton

himself poured coffee while the girl handed cups. Still there was no talk. And the silence, growing heavier with every moment, continued for a full minute after the servants had left the room. When speech did come, it came from the mistress of the house. But before she spoke, she fitted a fresh cigarette into the long amber holder and accepted without word the light with which Pursell, showing patently his relief at being able to move, was ready. She inhaled deeply. She put back her head and let smoke trickle from the wide nostrils of the short and egoistic and rather brutal nose. She said:

"It's high time, you know, that we had all this out. . . . I am speaking to all of you. I hope I don't sound as if I were being rude to my guests but, if I do, I can only ask them to forgive me." The gaze of the small, over-bright blue eyes travelled slowly and with a certain imperiousness round the group, coming finally to rest upon the downbent dark head of her daughter. "Now, then: let's begin with you, Gladys. I don't know what's happened to you or your manners! You behaved ridiculously at lunch just now. Suppose you explain yourself."

The girl stirred uneasy on her chair but did not lift her head. "Oh, mother!" she said. "Can't we . . . please . . . another time. . . ."

Again Enid Lester-Greene swept her audience with imperious blue gaze. "I have no doubt," she said, "that I am appearing unnecessarily dictatorial. I fear, also, that I may be appearing to cause discomfort. But I am afraid I cannot help it. After all, I am the mistress and owner of this house and I am sure that on deliberation every one will agree with me that there are certain matters which would be all the better for free discussion. . . . If you are so loath, Gladys, I will pass on to somebody else." She turned to Sandys. "Nor-

man! I believe you, too, are not free from this . . . this . . . what shall I call it? . . . ridiculous fancying?"

Charles dropped into a chair on the outskirts of the group and a little behind Maud Vassar. Once more, he admired the ready tact of Sandys. Before he had been appealed to, Sandys had not very well been able to speak, but now, with his first sentences, spoken with that pleasant, curiously-clipped enunciation of his, he seemed to remove much of the unpleasant tension. He said:

"You're quite right!" He smiled a little; a half-deprecatory smile which robbed his words of any possible incivility. "Quite right, that is, if you mean that I, in common with . . . er . . . other members of the household, have noticed some . . . well, rather curious and inexplicable happenings since we came to live here." Again the little smile. "I'm afraid I can't admit, though, that my noticing of these things is ridiculous."

There was a snort from his employer. She stood straight and a little massive; a figure not without dignity and certainly with an almost barbaric egoism. She stared round at the seated half-circle. "Very well then," she said, bringing her glance back to Sandys, "I think it is time we gave up whispering in corners and let these fancies have air. Nothing like a breath of fresh air! Suppose, Norman, that you tell the assembled company exactly what strange occurrences you yourself have experienced in Friar's Pardon." There was now in her voice an elephantine irony, which did much, Charles thought, to lessen her dignity.

The irony left Sandys unmoved; or, rather, glanced off him like arrow from cuirass. "By all means," he said. "The first thing I noticed—for I am not going

to talk here of intangible impressions "—again the faint little smile—" the first concrete thing I noticed, then, was upon the third day after we came here. It was a small thing, and I must admit I took no notice of it until other things of the same sort happened which brought it back to my memory. . . . I've got a habit —doubtless through having lived so much in foreign hotels—of locking my bedroom door every night. For the first two nights here, I didn't do this because, if you remember, several of the keys for the bedrooms had been mixed up by some mistake of the builders, but on the third night this had been rectified and all the keys were in their proper places. I remember, on that very night, being told by one of the maids that I now had the right key. Accordingly, just before I got into bed, I turned it in the lock. The next morning, however, found Bolton tapping on my door with my tea and being told by me, very sleepily and remembering only the first two nights when I hadn't been able to lock the door, to come in. . . ." He paused a moment here. His eyes left the face of his employer and flickered for an instant towards the heavy white lids of Maud Vassar who sat beside him. " Which," he said, speaking very slowly, " she did. . . . In other words, the door wasn't locked any longer." His voice ceased abruptly.

" Fatuous, ridiculous nonsense!" Enid Lester-Greene's voice broke the small silence which had followed the sudden conclusion. " You thought you had turned the key but you had not. . . . Next example, please! And all I can say, Norman, is that if it isn't more sensible than that as a . . . psychic phenomenon, you are a less intelligent person that I have taken you for for the past three years."

" The next . . . er . . . incident," said Sandys. unmoved, " took place exactly a week later. After a

very heavy day—it was just when we were finishing *The Man in Homespun*—I went to bed early. . . ."

"Locking your door?" said his employer, the irony heavier than ever.

"Locking my door," said Sandys calmly. "I read for a few minutes and then went straight to sleep. I must have been well off by eleven. I remember—and this is very important—thinking just before I dropped off that I hadn't opened the window and telling myself that I must get up and do it. But thinking that, after all, it was too much trouble and a chimney was enough ventilation once in a way, I didn't get up. At two o'clock in the morning, I was waked; I confess startlingly. I was waked by the most appalling crash I think I've ever heard. It was in my room. I switched on the bedside light, hopped out of bed and turned on the main light. Lying in the middle of the floor, six feet at least away from the table where it had been, was a big blue vase, smashed into hundreds of pieces. . . . Hundreds is a figure of speech. I actually counted the pieces and there were sixty. Remember that the door was locked and that the window was closed and that the table stood firmly against the wall away from any article of furniture. And that the blue vase—it was one of the Doultons—had stood undisturbed there ever since we furnished." Again he came to an abrupt stop. And again he turned to look at Maud Vassar.

This time Maud Vassar's eyes had opened. Slowly, she nodded her white head. A faint smile played about the corners of the mouth which was still beautiful.

There was a longer silence than there had been at the conclusion of Sandys's first story but again the breaker was his employer. Her tone, when she spoke, was expressive as a thousand snorts. She said:

"Sylvester Sound!"

"Eh?" said Sandys, puzzled. And then: "I beg your pardon?"

"Somnambulist. Walking in your sleep, Norman. . . . Next!"

"The next incident," said Sandys, a faint flush beginning to stain the sallow skin of his cheeks, "was the one which brought back to my mind the inexplicable locking of my door. This time—it was about a week after the vase—I woke up as usual when Bolton tapped at my door. As usual I said: 'Wait a minute!' and got out of bed. . . . I found the door locked but no key. I admit I was flabbergasted. I looked on the floor but no sign of the key. Not wishing to start any silly stories in the servants' hall, I told Bolton, in as casual a voice as I could manage, to put the tray down outside. She did and went away. That was at eight-fifteen. I found the key all right, but it took me over half an hour. In fact, just before I found it, I was wondering, if I began yelling and knocking, how long it would be before any one heard me. . . . And when I did find it"—his speech grew suddenly slower, each word coming out with a round emphasis of its own, impressive by reason of its untheatricality—"when I did find it, it was in a spot where I had looked, in the course of my search, not once, but twenty times at least. It stared at me from the mantelpiece." He seemed to be going to say more but then changed his mind. His mouth closed tightly and grimly as if determined not to let another word escape.

"Stuff," said Enid Lester-Greene, "and nonsense! Norman, you are in for a nervous breakdown! Any more?"

Sandys did not smile at her this time and when he spoke his tone was noticeably more curt but not yet openly uncivil. He said:

"Nothing concrete. I've heard things. Vague

sounds in the house and outside which I can't explain. I've also heard some of the servants' stories. But I haven't anything more to say."

"Umph!" said Enid Lester-Greene. "Trevor! Have *you* any startling stories to tell us?"

This time, Charles noticed, repressing a smile, that it was his employer's words only which bore traces of irony. Her tone was sweetness verging upon honey.

Poor Pursell, finding himself suddenly the centre of interest, with even Maud Vassar's wide gaze upon him, flushed a dull brick-red from collar to forehead.

"Oh, I say!" said Pursell, and stammering, got out, though not so lucidly as before, the strange story of his pyjamas.

During the halting recital, Charles kept his eyes not upon the teller but upon Enid Lester-Greene. He amused himself by watching the struggle in her face between scorn for a bad story-teller, lust for a lord, politeness for a guest and deep-rooted conviction of her own superior mentality. She said, when Pursell had finished and dropped into a chair where he sat openly mopping his brow:

"Very queer! I must say that *is* extraordinary! . . . But I am perfectly sure, you know, that if we took the trouble really to look into it, we should find some perfectly normal explanation; probably such an ordinary one that it has escaped our notice." The tone, although she strove to make it do so, did not tally with her words. She passed on, quickly, to another person whom openly she could browbeat and perhaps deride.

Claude Lester, when she addressed him, looked, Charles thought, like a defiant and rather vicious sixth-form boy taken to task in front of a lot of fags.

"Now you, Claude!" The voice was heavy with intolerance and edged with some other quality hard for Charles to define.

Claude Lester grunted. He did not look up.

"Have you anything to tell us?" said his sister. "Only please be brief!"

Claude Lester looked up at last. In his dark face resentment flared. Rebellion was in the air. He said: "There's a lot I *could* tell you but, between you and me, Enid, I don't think much of this public inquisition."

Silence. More uncomfortable by far than any of the many uncomfortable silences of this queer afternoon. The head of Enid Lester-Greene dropped down between her shoulders and then thrust itself forward. Her face, now, was ugly. She stared at her brother and it was plain that in her anger she had forgotten the presence of others. "Do you mean to tell me," she said, almost without opening her teeth, "that you are going to refuse to do what I ask?"

"Precisely!" Claude's eyes did not meet his sister's stare. But his tone was firm enough.

"*Really?*" The woman took a step forward; and another; and another. She stood over her brother. She looked down at him with a face which Charles, perhaps the only really detached onlooker, found an interesting though unpleasant study. The hinder legs of Claude Lester's chair were upon the parquet floor and now as he jumped up, thrusting his chair back, there was a wild screeching of wood against wood.

"You," he said, his head thrust out in a manner curiously resembling his sister's, "can go to hell!"

The rest of the party sat frozen into a horrid immobility. Discomfort held them in rigid grip. None turned to watch Claude Lester's exit, but all heard his rapid footsteps to the door and then the slamming of the door. Not moving, Enid Lester-Greene looked after him.

Sandys, the flush gone from his face, was once more his suave and efficiently tactful self. He began to talk.

He said, to no one in particular yet with the air of addressing each one in the room individually:

" Do you know, I'm sure that one of the few people who hasn't yet joined in this discussion—I mean you, Lady Maud—has the most interesting comments of all to make. After all, we're faced with apparently the most inexplicable things and Lady Maud is the only one among us who's been consistently, because of her life work, faced with similar inexplicable things. . . ." He went on and on. By the time he had finished, it is quite probable that no one in the room knew what he had been talking about, but it is also certain that they were all—even Enid Lester-Greene—grateful to him.

Whether or no in answer to Sandys's appeal, Lady Maud began to speak. She opened her eyes. " It's all very well," she said in her slow, high voice, limpid like a far-away stream, " to snap one's fingers at phenomena. But the old hackneyed quotation—addressed, I believe, to Horatio—is true. There *are* some things . . . however much my hostess, that champion of the common sense, may believe and state to the contrary. One may, even if one is looking for them, go through life without finding any of these . . . what shall I call them? . . . *extra* things. On the other hand, one may, even if one is not looking for them, find them obtruding themselves." Suddenly the odd eyes opened widely and fixed their stare upon the speaker's hostess. " And I say to you, Enid, that there are things in this house which it is impossible for you to continue closing your eyes to . . . I think that there is some one present here—I don't know, mind you, but I think I'm right —some one whom you haven't yet appealed to, who could tell us a far more . . . how shall I put it in ordinary phraseology? . . . a far more ***phenomenal*** thing than any you have yet heard."

She stopped as abruptly as after each of his stories

Sandys had stopped. Looking at her, the others saw that her eyes, still wide open in an unwinking stare, were fixed upon Lesley Destrier.

The white face of Lesley seemed to Charles, who wanted to jump out of his chair and take her away from this farrago, to grow yet whiter, although this a moment before had seemed impossible. But she spoke readily enough. She turned her head and looked straight into the eyes which had challenged her.

"I think," she said, "that you must have second sight, Lady Maud." For the moment the fleeting ghost of a wan smile lighted her face. "Or perhaps it's merely observation." She spoke very quietly, but Charles, watching keenly even though he had told his eyes not to, saw that the hands which lay apparently idle in her lap were gripping each other with a strength reflecting itself in the slight trembling of her upper arms. "You're quite right anyhow. . . . Until . . . until last night, I thought, like Enid, that every one else in the house was . . . was . . . well, just fancying things. But after last night . . ." Suddenly the voice quavered, broke and died away altogether. The golden head was bowed and the hands, ceasing to clutch each other, pressed themselves desperately over the eyes which were not blue and which were not green.

Another silence fell upon the room, broken only by the squeaking of Charles's chair as he repressed, with every atom of his will power, the spontaneous movement which had almost taken him to the aid of this distress.

"*You*, Lesley!" In the voice of Enid Lester-Greene there was now, besides intolerance, a sort of stupefaction. "*You*, Lesley!" she said again. "I was prepared for the others, but to think that you . . ."

The long slim hands came away from the white face and Lesley Destrier lifted her head. She said:

"Enid, you don't know! . . . *You don't know, I say!* If the thing that happened to me last night—the thing that I didn't mean to say anything about—if it had happened to you, well, you wouldn't be standing there being so . . . so . . . intolerant and . . . and . . . queenly!"

"Well?" Enid Lester-Greene pulled the stub of a cigarette from the amber holder and threw it, with a movement almost vicious, into the fire behind her. "Well, and what *did* happen to you last night? What extraordinary story have *you* got to tell?"

Lesley Destrier shot to her feet as if pulled by some violent invisible force. So sudden was her movement that her chair tilted, tottered and fell back with a crash on to the parquet flooring. She took three short, decisive steps forward so that now she stood with barely a pace between her and her interlocutor. Her arms hung straight down at her sides and Charles saw that at the end of these arms the slim, slight hands were clenched into tight, small fists. When she spoke, it was in a voice quite unlike any which Charles—or any other of the party—had ever heard her use. A tight, hard voice it was, with a grating note of determination and something very much like hatred in it. She said:

"What happened to me? . . . I'll tell you. Listen! And then send for a doctor if you want to. Send for two doctors and have me certified! That's probably what *you'll* want to do. What happened to me, you say. And I say I'll tell you *now* . . . I wasn't going to tell you, but you've insisted upon this appalling scene this afternoon and so you can have it, Enid!" Her words, as she continued speaking, came faster and faster. They rattled now through the silence like bullets. Almost they blurred each other but never quite.

"This is what happened to me . . ." she said. "I

went up to bed after we'd finished playing bridge down here. You remember? You and Mr. Sandys and Lord Pursell stayed. You tried to persuade me to have another rubber but I wouldn't. I was tired and I had a bad headache. I went up to my room and I got out of my clothes as quickly as I could and I chucked them on to a chair and I climbed into bed. And I thought: 'Thank God for sleep!' Because I don't sleep very well, you know. But I knew last night that once I'd got my head on the pillow and had the light out, I should sleep. But did I sleep? . . . I didn't! . . . Just as I put the light out and put my head on the pillow, I heard something sort of scraping across the window. . . . It was one of those sounds—*you* don't know them, I suppose, but p'raps other people do—one of those sounds which aren't like any sound you've heard before . . . *beastly* sounds! My heart flopped down into my tummy and then jumped up into my mouth. I wasn't sleepy any longer. I just lay there and quaked. Everything was quite quiet. Somewhere out in the garden there was an owl. But nothing else; nothing else for so long that I began to think it must have been my nerves. . . . And then, just as I *was* dropping off to sleep, it came again. . . . Now it was a sort of scraping, screeching rustle across the glass. And after that . . . after that . . . there was a *tapping* on the glass. 'One, one-two;' 'one, one-two'—like that. Not a blurred sort of sound that might have been an accident or a bird or a twig. . . . Nothing like that, but a definite 'one, one-two'; 'one, one-two. . . .'" The voice, which had started low, was gradually mounting. It was now a full octave higher than it had been on the first note of the recital. Her whole body was shaking; shaking with a passion of conviction, remembered fear, and endeavour to instil into the one unresponsive member of her audience her own emotions and belief.

"I lay there and fought with myself, Enid," she said. "Half of me—no, three-quarters of me—said: 'Stay where you are and put your head under the bedclothes!' And a quarter of me said: 'Get up and pull back those curtains and look. . . .' I don't suppose you'll understand, but, in spite of the odds, the single quarter won. I got up, switched on the bedside light and crept over to the window. . . . Do you know, it seemed like a mile instead of about four yards. But I got there. I remember standing, shaking inside, but outside telling myself that everything was all right and that I was quite calm, with my hand on the curtain before I drew it aside. I remember telling myself that when I *did* draw the curtain, I shouldn't see anything —of course, I shouldn't see anything! And then I *did* draw the curtain. . . . And, Enid, I *did* see something. . . . What I saw was a hand! . . . I pulled away the curtain and I thought I should die when I saw it . . . Just a hand! Nothing else! A *real* hand! A hand with its fingers crook'd. . . . Even while I looked at it, it tapped again: *One, one-two. One, one-two!* . . . I couldn't scream. I couldn't move. I couldn't do anything. I was what the story-books call 'petrified' . . . And I still am! The worst thing about the hand was a thing which I can't—just *can't* get out of my head: it was dark outside but yet the thing *shone*. . . . It seemed to have a light of its own; a blue light: not from anywhere outside it, you understand, but from the hand itself. Did I tell you what it did when I saw it? Did I? . . . It tapped again: *One, one-two. One, one-two!* Like that! That's what it did. And I don't know whether I told you: I couldn't move, I couldn't speak, I couldn't do anything but stand there, sort of frozen, and hold aside the curtain and watch it! And then . . . and then . . . Oh, God! I don't know how I can tell you this—and then . . . it seemed to sort of feel its way

towards the latch of the window. . . . And then . . . I . . . I . . . well, I'm sure I didn't faint because I was still standing up when I opened my eyes again, but I did close them and when something—something from outside me it was—told me to open my eyes again, I saw . . . what do you think I saw, Enid? . . ."

The last words were on a high head note which was yet a whisper; a most distressing sound, Charles thought. Unable to sit any longer, he stood, though as unobtrusively as possible.

" God knows!" There seemed an attempt in the voice of Enid Lester-Greene to bring the black and white of everydayness to the dialogue; but it was an attempt which failed. Her own voice showed that even she had got something of the tension; of the wild, unutterable, inner feelings of this small, lovely creature who was shouting at her in that dreadful whisper. So she tried again. She said:

" How could I tell? Probably a head upside down or something. You're a fool, Lesley!"

" I didn't," said Lesley Destrier, with a sort of cold and rather terrible calm, " see a head upside down. And I am *not* a fool! *You* know that. . . . What I saw when I opened my eyes was . . ." She took another step which, had her interlocutor not taken a hurried and undignified backward pace, would have made them, the short and the tall, almost touching.

" I saw," said Lesley Destrier, " ***nothing***! It wasn't there! Do you understand, Enid? *Do* you? . . . It wasn't there! The hand I saw wasn't there at all! It had gone. . . . But I'd swear on my own blood and on a stack of Bibles as high as this room, and on things I hold even more sacred than that, that when I looked first I *did* see that hand! I ***know*** . . . do you understand? . . . that I saw that hand. . . . No, of course,

you don't understand! Of course, you don't. . . . *You* wouldn't! Damn you, you *couldn't*! . . ."

Once more the parquet flooring reverberated to the tread of a rushing exit; and once more the door was slammed.

Charles, having willed his legs not to follow, braced himself for another appalling silence. But it did not come. Once more he was forced to admire Sandys and Sandys's tact.

Sandys stood up. He looked straitly at his employer. When he spoke, his words and tone were firm without rudeness, civil without servility, and final without seeming to attempt usurpation. " Don't you think," he said, " that this discussion might more profitably be renewed at some other time? A lot has been said, you know, and a lot which even you ought to treat seriously. I really do suggest that we drop the whole thing now and agree later to-day when we'll start talking about it again. I think, you know . . ."

The thought, whatever it was, was never to be put into words. A sound from outside the room brought all the seated members of what was left of the party to their feet and every eye, wide and staring, to the door. It was a sound which was perhaps ordinary enough in an ordinary house, but a sound which, coming in this house and at this time, was open to no prosaic interpretation. It had not really been so much a sound as a succession of sounds—first a screeching, scrabbling sound; then a high-pitched, short scream; then—grand finale!—a thud and a jingling, splintering crash, echoing and ringing.

Charles, once more in his rôle of onlooker, let his glance flutter round the group. He saw Maud Vassar, straight and tall, her eyes wide open, her lips slightly parted and her head thrust forward in an attitude of strangely eager anticipation. He saw his employer

with mouth open, fish-like, and staring astonished gaze. He saw Gladys Lester-Greene with her arms flung across her face and her whole body seeming to cringe. He saw Pursell, who had dropped his monocle in the first shock of astonishment, peering round in search of it. And last of all, he saw Sandys. Sandys's face gave him a shock. It was pale with a sudden dire pallor which made the ordinarily olive-hued skin seem the colour of wood-ash. And Sandys's eyes were staring and his lips were moving soundlessly.

"Tableau mordant," thought Charles. And then, since no one else seemed likely to, made first move. In three smooth, unhurrying but rapid strides, he was at the door. He flung it open and passed through it and the others crowded after him.

In the passage—the corridor which led from the billiard room past the drawing-room in its right wall and the sun-room in its left—there was nothing. But just round the corner, out of sight as you came from the drawing-room, there was something. Charles, being still ahead, found it first. What he found was Lesley Destrier. She sat surrounded by the ruins of a blue and gold Nan-King vase. Its ebony stand lay behind her and its pieces were all about her feet and legs.

Charles stooped, holding out a hand. She looked up and he became aware, with a sudden shock of surprise which in itself surprised him, that she was laughing; laughing weakly, helplessly, joyously; laughing until tears were brimming under the lids of the eyes which were not blue and which were not green. She saw the hand through the tears, put her right one into it and her left over it and, in a lithe swing, was upon her feet, to face, just as they streamed round the corner, her hostess and the others.

"What," said Enid Lester-Greene, looking with

coldly blazing wrath upon the ruins, " is there to laugh about. . . ."

Lesley's laughter ceased abruptly; too abruptly for Charles. She said, with an undercurrent in her voice which suggested that soon the laughter might be replaced by tears:

" I'm . . . I'm terribly sorry. . . . It was only . . . I thought . . . I hoped you wouldn't think I was . . . the poltergeist . . . because I only slipped. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

PATCHWORK

I

FOR the remainder of the afternoon and evening, Charles, who wanted to be out and about the thousand acres of which as yet he had had only a bird's eye view, was forced by circumstance and the definite wish of his employer to remain indoors. He sat from half-past three until half-past four in Sandys's office going through such of the estate papers as he could find in the intervals of the man's frequent departures from the room; departures which invariably followed the violent buzzing of the single line telephone from his employer's study. If the papers had been fuller or even in less neat order, it is probable that Charles would have silenced the discursiveness of Sandys. As it was, he was inclined to welcome it. This menage was, he admitted to himself, one of the most interesting, as it was certainly the least placid in which he had ever been. The one man who knew it from side to side and back to front was Sandys. And Sandys, apparently grateful to have a new and intelligent male with whom to talk, unbosomed himself. He began—this was before the

first of the telephone summonses—by standing in the middle of the room and looking down at Charles with a cock of his eyebrow. He said:

"I'd like to know, Fox-Browne, what you think of us? I'd give a good deal to know, in fact. I think it would certainly be amusing. And healthily salutary as well."

Charles grunted; but it was a pleasant grunt by no means forbidding. He was not a man who would, in ordinary circumstances, have discussed his employer and her family and her household with another employee, but Friar's Pardon was no ordinary circumstance. That much at least his five hours' sojourn had shown him plainly. And so he let Sandys talk.

"Closely related," said Sandys grinning, "to the oyster family, aren't you? Never mind, that suits me. I like talking, you know; like it much better than listening. But all the same—and I'm quite serious—I would like to know what you thought of that cabal over coffee."

Charles stood up and stretched, and lounged over to the fire to knock out the ashes from his pipe.

And then came the first blatant, blaring buzz of the private telephone. Sandys was at it in an instant. "Hello! . . . Yes . . . I'll come up at once. . . . Yes, I'll bring those, too." He threw away a cigarette; winked at Charles; gathered, in two deft movements, two bundles of papers, one from each side of his desk, and was gone.

Charles stood warming his back and re-filling his pipe. He had not got it into his mouth before a light footstep and the opening of the door announced the return of Sandys, now without his papers. He looked at Charles with his dark eyes full of laughter, but there was a rueful twist to his mouth. He said:

"Balloon's gone up! Sky high! E. L.-G's in one

of the worst tantrums I've ever struck and I thought I knew 'em all! When she sent for those papers I thought she was going to work, but praise the Lord she's not! She's walking up and down like a lion and summoning her subjects. First one's Gladys. I've just met the poor girl in the hall and told her. . . . D'you know, Fox-Browne, it's damned odd the power that swollen-headed, pompous, elderly-middle-aged-woman's got over that kid. Talk about the intelligence and self-reliance of the young! My word! Gladys has got about as much intelligence as a snake-charmer's star cobra and about as much self-reliance as a February lamb. She's gone up like a nice obedient little girl and she looks just as she might look if she were a kid of twelve going to get a good hiding. I expect she's going to get a bellyful. 'What do you mean, Gladys, by your ridiculous behaviour?' 'How dare you start these uncomfortable scenes?' 'If you have no respect or consideration for your mother, I'm afraid I must ask you to have some for my guests.' 'And if you think for one moment that I'm going to be driven out of Friar's Pardon by your senseless chatter or anybody else's, you're very much mistaken!' . . . You know the sort of thing. I'm sorry for her, but one day I dare say I shall turn round and be sorry for the other half of the relationship. Sometimes little Gladeyes, when the rebellious fit's on, looks as if she'd like to carve E. L.-G. up with a piece of bottle glass and then throw the bits into the fire.' He ceased abruptly and pulled the slim gold case from his pocket. He said, after he had lighted a cigarette. "But I think you were going to tell me what you thought of us?"

Charles nodded. "Queer lot," he said. "Doesn't seem to be a rational being in the house except Pursell."

For a moment Sandys stared; then suddenly began

a smile which ended in laughter. "Frank, aren't you?" he said. "I must say I agree with you except that I've been flattering myself for some time that the only rational person in the house was Norman Sandys."

Charles smiled his queer little half-smile which moved only one side of his mouth. He shook his head. "Not at all. Sorry. Probably were before you got into this galley."

"Well, I'm *damned*!" said Sandys softly. He threw away his half-smoked cigarette with a gesture almost violent. "Well, go on. One appears to get the truth from you. Without much sugar on it, either. Where does my irrationality come in? And do I send for a doctor or wait until some one else has to get two?" His brown eyes looked into Charles's grey ones.

"Sorry," Charles said. "No offence. Your behaviour *is* rational. A damn sight more than any of the others. What I mean: I think you're gettin' all boiled up internally. So?"

Sandys, plunging his hands into his pockets, turned his back and began to pace this way and that across the width of the narrow room. There was silence except for the soft sound of his footsteps upon the carpet. Charles, his head wreathed in smoke from his pipe, quietly watched.

"Look here!" said Sandys, suddenly coming to a halt. And then: "Oh! damn!" for the telephone was once more angrily buzzing. He snatched at it. "Hello! . . Yes. . . . Very well . . ." He slammed the thing back upon its hook and for a moment stared across the room at Charles. He said:

"Any more for the Inquisition? One down, t'other go up. I've got to find Mrs. Destrier now."

"You won't," said Charles calmly. "While you were upstairs just now I looked out into the hall. She passed me. Dressed for walking. Said she'd be out

a couple of hours at least." His tone could have given no indication whatever to any one that he was brazenly lying.

"That's good," Sandys said, and his hand once more went out for the telephone. But he withdrew it. "Better go up," he said, and was gone. This time he was away longer; perhaps five minutes, perhaps ten. When he came back he was grinning.

"Lance-corporal Number 1234, Claude Lester for the Orderly Room!" he said. "I can tell you, Fox-Browne, there'll be feathers and fur and bits of skin flying about up there. . . . What do you think of *him*?"

"Looks forty," said Charles. "Probably forty-five. Bad liver. Enlarged spleen. Too many pink gins for too many years. Pose: the irascible, soldierly, strong-willed good fellow. Character: nervous, imaginative, weak-willed, anything but soldierly, rage sometimes masquerading as guts."

Sandys opened his eyes. "Pretty good!" he said slowly. A fleeting rather tired smile crossed his face. "Any more?"

'Perhaps,' Charles said. "More chancey though. Doesn't like his sister but sponges on her. Keeps trying to get away. Can't stay away. Comes back whenever things get tight which they do pretty quickly. E. L.-G. puts up with him. Small percentage of blood affection; large percentage of commandism."

Again Sandys stared. "Damn good!" he said. "Now, back to me. Before the 'phone went just now I was asking you, I think, whether *I* call in a doctor or wait for somebody else to call in two."

Charles shrugged. "Exaggerating a bit," he said. "Keep hold of yourself. Don't let the job get you down." His pipe was empty again and he put his hand to his pocket to bring away an empty pouch. In his

trunk were three pound-tins of his tobacco. "Back in a minute," he said and was gone.

Sandys, who had thrown himself into one of the big chairs on the hearth, stared after him.

2

Charles came out of his bedroom at the end of the west wing, in his pocket a newly-filled tobacco pouch, between his teeth an empty pipe. He shut the door behind him and turned right and walked a few paces to the main corridor which ran the whole length of the house. Turning left into this corridor on silent feet, he came face to face with a member of the household whom he had not hitherto seen but whom that encyclopædic memory of his immediately placed as the poor-cousin-turned-housekeeper.

He stopped abruptly to avoid collision. He saw, standing before him with suddenly white face and eyes dilated by something very much like terror, a tall and thin, middle-aged woman with black, grey-streaked hair tightly and tidily arranged; clothes of black silk reaching from chin to ankles and a carriage and features which, in some dim, faded way, recalled the massive proudness of Enid Lester-Greene. There was something, thought Charles, caninely pathetic about the whole figure, although, in spite of this sudden meeting with a stranger which so patently had frightened her, she held herself with a very definite and almost aggressive pride. He could not tell where the pathos lay. But that it was there and very definitely there could be told by his sudden wide smile and friendly speech. He said:

"I'm so sorry! Very stupid of me. I think you must be Mrs. Barratt? I'm Charles Fox-Browne. We've

got the same sort of jobs. You do the inside. I do the out."

The colour flowed slowly back into thin waxen cheeks. The blue eyes, larger and paler than Enid Lester-Greene's but nevertheless reminiscent, stared unwinkingly at this strange man who was being pleasant to her.

She said, after a long pause: " I was just going to your room, Mr. Fox-Browne, to see that everything was in order."

" Perfect," said Charles. " Thanks very much. The way Friar's Pardon seems to be run is a great credit to you, Mrs. Barratt."

He smiled again and stepped aside as if to continue on his way. But as he moved he caught a glance from the faded blue eyes; a glance which had in it a desperate appeal. Only for an instant was the appeal there. Immediately the eyes were veiled again to become blank, pale agates. But Charles thought he knew for what the appeal had been. This woman, moving as Sandys had said in a half-world of her own, was starved of talk, even such very small talk as this. He checked his progressive movement, making it seem that his step to one side had been merely a changing of position. He said:

" Saw workmen just now. In the big lobby facing the top of the stairs. Suppose there's still a lot to be done here. But you're making it look as if there wasn't."

For an instant the veil over the pale eyes was raised again, to show this time a flaming, pathetically disproportionate gratitude. She said in her dry, thin voice like to her lordly cousin's only in pitch:

" Oh! that's for the palm court. It's going to be behind those swing doors which shut the lobby off on the right-hand side. You know, next to Mrs. Lester-Greene's study. I think it's going to be lovely. Have you looked through the door, Mr. Fox-Browne?"

Charles shook his head. "It *is* going to be lovely," said the thin voice. "Lovely! It's a flagged floor there, you know, but it's centrally heated and very, very warm. They're getting the plants in now and the chairs and things are all ready downstairs. I think Mrs. Lester-Greene wants to use it for coffee after dinner to-night so you'll see it then, won't you? I do hope you'll like it."

"Palm court?" said Charles, racking his brains to carry on this trifling conversation—a more difficult matter perhaps for him than for nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of any chosen thousand. "Oh, yes, of course," he went on nobly. "Palm court! Yes, I saw the glass doors propped open as I came up and some palms and things. . . . Yes, I should think that would be very nice. Very nice indeed."

He sought wildly, behind an impassive, smiling face, for fresh fields of chit-chat. His eye fell upon the doorway of the room outside which they were standing, and an idea came to him.

"I wonder, Mrs. Barratt," he said glibly, "whether you could tell me who my neighbours are?"

"Certainly, Mr. Fox-Browne. Certainly." Her voice seemed to have lost much of its aridity. It was warmer and nearly trembling with eagerness. She said, turning to face towards the stair lobby and the palm court beyond which ran the east wing:

"Yours, Mr. Fox-Browne, is the last room. But, of course"—she laughed a little—"you must know that. Then this room here"—she tapped the wall by which they were standing—"is Lady Maud Vassar's, or it's two rooms really because although there's only one door, there's a separate bathroom inside. The big room next, which takes the space between Lady Maud's room and the stair lobby, is Mrs. Lester-Greene's. That's two rooms, too, in the same way. Then across the lobby,

there's the biggest spare room of all, which at present Mrs. Destrier has. After that there's another cross passage like the one your room's in, and facing the end wall of Mrs. Destrier's room, across that passage, a bathroom and Mr. Sandys's room. Now for the other side. We've got behind us, facing the wall of your room, the back stairs, with an entrance in the cross passage, and the still room, also with its entrance in the cross passage. Next "—she pointed to the room immediately upon their right—" is a bathroom; then comes Miss Gladys Lester-Greene's room and then another guest room which Lord Pursell has. Then there's the palm court and then, on the right hand side of the east wing, there's Mrs. Lester-Greene's study, facing Mrs. Destrier's room; then the cross passage; and then the last room, which is the only other guest room on this floor, is Major Lester's."

" Thanks," said Charles. " Thanks. What about the next floor? I suppose that's mostly servants' quarters?"

" The servants' quarters, Mr. Fox-Browne, are entirely in the west wing; just above us. They're shut off from the stair lobby by a baize door. In the east wing there are no fewer than seven other guest rooms. . . . I can assure you, Mr. Fox-Browne, that to look after a house of this size is no easy task."

" I'm perfectly certain," said Charles with conviction, " that it can't be." He looked at his watch, making unobtrusive parade of his action.

" But there!" said Mrs. Barratt, some of the eagerness gone from her tone, but gratitude remaining, " I'm keeping you."

" Not at all," said Charles, " not at all! It must be I that have kept you."

" It's so nice," said the woman, " to have some one . . ."

She did not finish the sentence. The door of Gladys Lester-Greene's room was thrown suddenly open and there floated out into the corridor a soprano voice singing on the high metallic head-note of the Parisian Music Halls, a bar of *Mironton Mirontaine.* The voice was immediately followed by its owner—another member of the household whom Charles had not before seen. A pleasing sight, this. Charles's quick and appreciative eye took her in in one glance from the top of her neat, capless, shining, chestnut-coloured hair to her neat, shining shoes of patent leather; a trim and provocative little figure whose every movement spoke of its owner's knowledge of her attractions. For the rest, a big-eyed, impudent, round little face with wide, laughing mouth and pert, pretty little nose; a white, belaced, entirely useless little apron over dark, short-skirted frock worn with an air which turned it into a gown, and much gleaming silk stocking over admirable legs. *Mironton* was cut off in the middle of a bar, the singer clapping a hand, with a gesture half fearful, half impudent, over her mouth.

"Thérèse! The voice of Mrs. Barratt was steel and ice.

The hand came away from the mouth. "*Mille pardons!* M'dame Barah . . . I think that I disremember myself, *hein.*" The voice was fitting to the rest of the picture; a pleasant rounded cadence, little devils of humorous impudence peeping round the corner of every word. The speech was directed at the figure now so straight and rigid beside Charles, but the eyes were upon this new man; discreetly, but there nevertheless. Charles met them for an instant with a blank grey stare. Beside him he could feel indignation flowing from the housekeeper. He saw a chance of reasonably escaping and took it. He murmured something and was gone.

As he walked up the corridor with his long, rolling stride, he heard behind him in decreasing volume the acidity of the Barratt voice. It rose and fell in waves of denunciation.

3

Charles came out at the mouth of the corridor. Behind him he could still hear, faintly, the strident recriminations of Mrs. Barratt. To his left, as he came out into the lobby, was the stairhead, while to his right were the glass swing doors, now propped open, which led to the palm-court-to-be. In the palm court were now no workmen but already the place showed form and purpose. The plants were there, huge and bulbous and gigantic in their boxed-in beds, and ferns were there. And as he paused between the doors to look, a wave of warm air from the concealed pipes swept over him like a caress. In the far south-easterly corner was a pile of chairs, in the south-westerly corner a pile of small tables. From behind him, as he passed into the palm court, he could hear coming up the staircase the sound of workmen's footsteps and voices in the main hall below. He shifted his stance a little, backing and then looking to his right down the east wing and to his left down the west. He pondered the size of the square, two-halved lobby in which he stood, the length and breadth of the wings of the house, and he thought without conscious volition of the first three chapters which were all that he had been able to manage of *Paradise for Two*. He smiled a little wryly. It was easy—very easy—for some people to make fortunes. As he pondered, the wryness left his smile. He was always a man who sought the odd and the unusual, and therefore, to him, interesting. And here, surely, he had found them. A queer house and queer people! He remembered suddenly Sandys's office, and Sandys, and Sandys's con-

versation. He would, he decided, return to them. He had intimated that his return would be swift and already he must have spent ten to fifteen minutes away. He swung on his heel so that his back was to the palm court and he was facing the stair lobby and stair head. His left foot came out to take a stride forward, but was arrested in mid-air. Behind him in the background, a door opened violently, and there assaulted his ear two voices speaking—or was it shouting?—simultaneously. A man's voice and a woman's. Enid Lester-Greene's voice undoubtedly, and a voice—whose was it?—that he had heard it before upon this day he was sure. Ah! He had it. Claude Lester's voice. Some mild spirit of gentility within him bade him go forward. But some much stronger sense of curiosity bade him stay still—for the moment at least. There had been a queer sound to these voices and any more queer things in this house were fit subjects to collect, pin, ticket, and file away in his memory; file away for future reference and thought. For Charles was a man—and he knew it, albeit reluctantly—to whom human nature and its study was a passionate interest, especially when human nature began to kick over the traces and run true to form rather than true to the badly but firmly-railed courses of civilisation. . . .

And so he waited and his waiting was rewarded. The two voices momentarily ceased their simultaneous cacophony. They began to speak separately. Charles heard, first, the voice of Enid Lester-Greene. He became passionately interested—he was a man of ripe experience ready to condone in such special circumstance his own eavesdropping—in the right-angle formed by the wall of the stair lobby and the outer wall of the southern side of the western wing. He stepped three paces—soft silent paces—to his left, judging that these paces would bring him out of sight of the

two people who must, by their voices, be standing just within the door, in the eastern side of the palm court, to the study of the Lester-Greene.

". . . and I tell you, Claude, that if you continue to behave in this insolent manner, I shall have to take drastic steps!"

"You can take, my dear Enid, whatever steps you like, as long as they aren't steps in my direction!"

"But they will be in your direction, Claude! Very much so. And the only direction, I fear, which will touch you. If I don't have a complete apology from you by midday to-morrow, I shall not only cut your allowance in half, but I shall make decided alteration in a certain document of which you are perfectly well aware. . . ."

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about, and what's more, I don't care!"

"You are not only rude and insolent, Claude, but an ungrateful and quite unconvincing liar. You know perfectly well to what document I am referring. I mean the document to which *you* have referred more than once in the course of our interview. I think what you called it, in that sneering, would-be-clever-way of yours, was 'the last will and testament of Enid Lester-Greene, novelist and bully!' Am I not right?"

"Enid! If you'd only stop talking for two hours out of the twenty-four, you might be a pleasanter woman!"

"Claude! . . . Never mind, I've said my say. By twelve o'clock to-morrow a complete apology *or* . . ."

"Go to *hell*!"

On the word "hell," Charles moved. He was always a man who knew when movement was required. By the time that Claude Lester had reached the point of the lobby from which the corridors ran off, he could only see—if he looked at all—Charles's back walking towards his room.

Charles—he was always thorough—did go to his room, entering and closing the door behind him. After he had closed the door he counted ten; then passed out again, back along the way he had come.

But he was only to meet another contretemps. Before he was quite at the mouth of the main corridor he saw the door of the room upon the left—the room opposite the study which Mrs. Barratt had told him was Lesley Destrier's—open to let out into the corridor Lesley herself. He checked in his stride, quite why he could not have told you or himself. But whatever its cause, the pause was long enough to show him that the woman advancing towards him down the corridor of the eastern wing was not looking at the western corridor down which he was coming or at anything which might be in it. Something in her stride; her manner; something, anyhow, told him that she was making for the study. And just as he resumed his walk, she reached the lobby and turned left through the propped-open doors of the palm court. . . .

Charles's was a quick mind. Charles ran. He caught her half-way between the study door in the palm court and the right-angled junction of the wall of the palm court and the corridor. He said—and to do him justice he coloured as he said it:

"Mrs. Destrier! Were you going to see Mrs. Lester-Greene?"

She halted as he ran up to her. The eyes which were of that lovely colour which was not definable looked up into his. He noticed that there now was colour in the cheeks, but being of some experience he knew how faulty were the eyes of man and could not tell whether this colour might or not be real.

"I beg your pardon!" said a still, cold voice which made him feel, although he did not show it by any

twitch of muscle, that he was a small boy with quaking knees.

Finding to his disgust that his voice insisted upon being a whisper, he did his best. He told, in a few short words jerked out of him in the fragmentary sentences of which his talk was nearly always composed, of what had followed the discomfortable half-hour in the drawing-room over coffee. He said at the end:

". . . just impulse. Thought you wouldn't want to be worried. Unpardonable impudence. Told Sandys when she rang for him to get you that I'd seen you going for a walk. Don't want to make any trouble. Not even for myself! Must apologise for my impertinence. Thought you wouldn't care for another scene. 'Specially in *camera*."

Charles was reckoned a man of courage. He had been in more tight corners than most men. He was a man, as has been said, of far above the average experience, and he was not accustomed to feeling that he must brace himself in order not to quail. But he did quail. The eyes whose colour he could not define looked at him and pierced him through. They were cold and hard and the mouth which he had privily considered surely the most beautiful under sun or earth was set in icier lines than he had imagined possible.

She did not speak. She turned upon her heel and continued her journey to the study door and she tapped upon the study door. From where he stood, Charles could not hear the reply, but there must have been one for, after an instant's pause, the straight figure braced itself and entered.

The door closed. Charles, his deep reddish tan two shades lighter than was usual, shrugged his shoulders, a defiant gesture which made him feel no better.

He turned on his heel and walked to the stairhead and began descent.

4

Sandys, when Charles went back into the office, was sitting exactly as he had been left. He said, looking up from the big chair:

"Been a long time."

Charles nodded. He walked to the fire and began to fill the pipe for which he suddenly realised he had been longing.

"Met the housekeeper," he said.

Sandys cocked an eyebrow. "Any one else?"

"Dazzling Paris," said Charles. "What is it?"

Sandys frowned. "Thérèse," he said. "Thérèse Gautier. Valets Gladeyes and occasionally, because she won't stand much of it, E. L.-G. herself. Nasty *gamine*, Thérèse."

"Looked all right to me," said Charles, filling his pipe. "Difficult to fault in her class."

Sandys grunted. He said:

"See any eruptions from the Lioness's den?"

"One," said Charles. "Brother. Parties sounded peeved."

Again Sandys grunted. "When was that?"

"Just now." Charles struck a match and put it to his pipe and began to puff.

"That means," said Sandys, "that the 'phone's going to . . ."

It did. Its buzzing filled the long narrow room.

This time, instead of jumping, Sandys lounged. He took his time. He picked up the instrument. "Hello! . . . Yes . . ." His voice was almost drawling. "Yes . . . I haven't the faintest idea . . . Very well . . . No . . . Very well, I'll come up." He hung up the instrument and looked across at Charles. There was a bitter twist to his mouth. "Work," he said. "Ye Gods! Work! W-o-erk. Not on *A Star Despite*

Herself, but proofs—and proofs, ye great fat-bellied gods, of *The Man in Homespun*! And I might tell you, Fox-Browne, that of all the maudlin, pettifogging, delirious outpourings of septic deleterious twaddle that ever our Enid has produced, *The Man in Homespun* takes a very easy first prize! I'll take care that you get given a presentation copy."

He opened the drawer and took out a flat, wide, black-bound note-book, having pencils strapped to its sides by an elastic band. He walked to the door. He said over his shoulder: " Not that you won't get one anyhow *if* you're here by the time the thing comes out."

5

Charles, having stood where he was for some moments after Sandys's exit, sauntered over to his own table, picked up the estate file—the last file of all those he had been perusing—and carried it over to its cabinet and locked it away. He was now, he found, without anything to do and also under orders—for that is what the last, painfully polite request of The Empress had amounted to, not to leave the house in case she might wish to speak to him. But he saw no valid reason why he should stay in this room. And so he left it. As, coming out into the hall, he closed the office door behind him, he saw standing in front of the great fireplace the tall, straight, slim figure, girlish in outline and yet aged in effect, of Maud Vassar.

It had been his intention to turn right, and right again, and go down the corridor of the eastern wing to the billiard room. But this was not to be. He felt, rather than saw, that Maud Vassar's eyes were on him and he saw, rather than felt, that she raised a hand and beckoned to him. He crossed the long hall diagonally to his right and came to a stand beside her. Even

though she was standing he found that as he drew near the heavy white lids were dropped once more over the clear eyes, and when she spoke it was still without raising them. She said:

" I should like it, Mr. Fox-Browne, if you could spare an old woman a few minutes of that time which seems, to-day at least, to hang so heavy on your hands."

Charles, knowing by the length of the silence which followed this remark that he was expected to speak, did so. He made sounds in his throat which being interpreted might have been the words: " not at all."

Still the eyes did not open, but the voice went on: " Mr. Fox-Browne," said the old lady, " I feel that you and I might be friendly enemies."

" The adjective," said Charles, who could, if necessary, be courtly, " I agree to, Lady Maud. I should not like to have to agree to the noun."

" If," said Maud Vassar, opening her eyes for an infinitesimal fragment of time which yet seemed to Charles, looking into them, timeless, " you try and be ' old-world ' with me, Mr. Fox-Browne, I shall give you up altogether. Or, possibly, do you in altogether. Chopped bamboo in soup, I believe, is excellent."

Charles put back his head and laughed.

" That's better," Maud Vassar said. " Much better . . . As a rule, Mr. Fox-Browne, I don't like what I term young-middle-aged-men, but I must confess that I like you. I like you, probably, all the better because you're an enemy. . . ."

Charles, being interested, volunteered interruption. " You keep," he said, " using the word enemy. Don't know what you mean, Lady Maud." He found himself looking suddenly into her eyes, deep wells of that clear colour known for some reason, to this day indiscernible, as hazel.

" I do," said Maud Vassar, " love a good liar who

can look me straight in the face while he's lying! . . . You know perfectly well, young man—or should I say young-middle-aged-man—that if I called you a liar for that last remark of yours, I at least am not lying."

Again Charles put back his head and laughed. He said, and with some degree of honesty:

"I admit I was lying, but I didn't know it. I think you mean that I am a materialist and you are not. About this house."

She nodded. "I asked you to come and talk to me, Mr. Fox-Browne, because I wondered whether by any chance you knew anything of the history of this house?"

"A little," Charles said. "Only by hearsay."

"You have heard," she said in the youthful voice that blended astonishingly and yet pleasantly with her appearance, "that this house was built 230 years ago and has only been inhabited, before this inhabitation I mean, by two families?"

"Yes," said Charles.

"You have heard that all the heads of these two families who took up their living in this house died queer deaths?"

"Yes," said Charles.

"And you know, Mr. Fox-Browne, what shape these queer deaths took?"

Charles pondered for a moment. "Yes," he said at last. "Or I think so. Some talk of drowning without water."

"Yes," said Maud Vassar. "And you have heard where these deaths took place in this house?"

"No," said Charles

"They took place," said Maud Vassar, and now her eyes were unwinkingly open and filled with a light which Charles found hard to bear upon his own eyes, "in that part of the east wing which Enid now persists in using as her study."

"Oh!" said Charles, feeling that some sound from him was necessary to fill the pause.

"Yes, all of them! . . . The room which is now Enid's study was, until Enid took the house, two rooms. And it was in the farther of those that the Westmacotts and Deaves met their deaths. . . . And now, Mr. Fox-Browne, there are people in this house—ordinary every-day men and women—originally just as determinedly prosaic as you, who have had, as you heard in the drawing-room this afternoon, peculiar experiences since they came to eat and live and sleep in this house. . . ."

"Yes," said Charles, and waited. He waited long. If you were to ask him now, he would probably tell you that the wait was a minute's wait, but if you had asked him an hour later how long the silence had been, he might have told you five minutes.

"That's all," said Maud Vassar, "only, Mr. Fox-Browne, remember Horatio! . . ."

Charles strolled down the corridor towards the billiard room. Behind him in the hall Maud Vassar still stood before the fire. In the billiard room, as he had hoped, was Pursell, who sat half-buried in one of the big arm-chairs by the fireplace listlessly reading *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour*.

"Billiards?" said Charles.

The volume of Surtees slid to the floor with a loud thump. Pursell sprang to his feet. He beamed and his monocle flashed joyously. "My dear fellah!" he said. "The moment I set eyes on you, you know, Fox-Browne, I said to myself: 'Here, at last, is a chap that a chap can talk to.' Billiards, says you? Aye, aye, Skipper! . . . Let's make it five hundred, then if we haven't finished by tea, we can go on afterwards."

Charles shook his head. "Sometime I've got to work. Like to now but I've got to hang about for orders."

Pursell was vigorously grooming the cloth. "Righto! Righto! All the same to me! Two hundred then. Half a dollar a hundred, eh?"

He finished his ministrations and threw the brush on to a table. He pranced like a schoolboy with an unexpected half-holiday. He went to the rack, where Charles already was, and took a cue and began to chalk it.

They tossed for break and Charles won. But he had not done more than get down for his shot when there came interruption. They heard the door at the other end of the long room open and a quick, light footstep and then the voice of Sandys.

"Sorry, Pursell!" it said. "But I wonder whether you could spare your hostess a few minutes. She asked me whether you would be good enough, if you could, to go along to her study. She's free now."

Pursell took his monocle from his eye and slid it into a waistcoat pocket. He had found from long experience that if he frowned with it in it was liable to slip. And now he was frowning. He looked like the schoolboy who has found the half-holiday to be nothing but a joke of Jones minor's. He said, with a despairing and entirely unsuccessful effort at grace:

"Righto!" He turned and crossed the room with long, lagging strides. His shoulders were bowed and his carriage woebegone.

Charles put his cue back into its case and the case back into the rack. He looked at Sandys to find an unusual grey pallor on the olive-skinned face.

"I," said Sandys, "am getting fed up with to-day. I can stand a certain amount of bad weather but not too much of it. I've got a feeling, Fox-Browne, that before I'm very much older I'm going to be very rude. If I thought I'd get the sack, I believe I'd go and be it now."

Charles took out his pipe and began to fill it. He looked the inquiry that seemed expected of him but did not speak.

It was enough for Sandys. Sandys seemed to be thirsty for speech and a little reckless as to how he quenched the thirst. He said:

"One blasted row after another! And I'm the goat-herd. I have to run about like a dog with two tails rounding up goats for sacrifice."

"Mrs. Destrier," said Charles, polishing the bowl of his pipe upon the heel of his hand, "wasn't long."

Sandys looked at him. "She was not. And, by the way, Fox-Browne, where did you get that tale about her going out for a walk? Must've been a quick one. And when she came out of the study just now she didn't look as if she'd been out. Hadn't got the right shoes on."

Charles became suitably puzzled. "Can't understand it," he said, with unusual loquacity. "Can't understand it at all! Sure I saw her . . . Look here, Sandys, d'you think I'm beginning to see things?"

Sandys flung away from him with an impatient movement; only to turn back immediately. But he did not, and Charles was thankful, pursue this line. He said instead:

"First poor little Gladeyes. Then Lester. Then Lesley. And now Baron Pursell of Mitcham. I wonder who the next is. I suppose she'll start on the underlings. Me first; then poor old Cinderella Barratt; and then you if she gets a chance. No, I don't mean that, really. She's not so damn stupid as to go for you yet. . . ."

"Lady Maud?" said Charles.

Sandys shook his head. "Not on your life! You know what I told you about Friar's Pardon? Publi-

city. Well, E. L.-G.'s got a bad temper but she's never let it get the better of her to the extent of spoiling her press. Friar's Pardon's good copy anyhow, but it's a hundred per cent. better with Maud Vassar here; not only because of her handle but because Maudie's such a famous spookist. Besides, I think that if E. L.-G.'s frightened of any one in the world, it's her principal guest. . . . No, after she's finished with Pursell—and that won't be much of a row, mark you!—she'll start on me. I can see all the signs of it. . . . Wonder what she's sent for Pursell for?" He paused and looked at Charles as if expectant of a theory. But Charles was silent.

Sandys put his hands behind him on the edge of the billiard table and leant upon them. "You know why Pursell's been brought here, don't you? . . . He's here for Gladeyes. The Lester-Greenes shall leave the musty pages of *Who's Who* for the be-flowered scroll of *Burke*. . . . Pursell's broke. All that lot are. And Gladeyes is far from broke. . . . But whether he'll ever come up to scratch or not, God alone knows. . . . Funny thing though, the chap seems frightened of E. L.-G. I don't mean frightened in the sense that lots of people are frightened of her—just nervous of a very successful, rather domineering woman—I mean really dead scared of her. Can't understand it at all! . . . But then, except for me and Maudie—and now I must include you—every one in the house is frightened of her or behaves as if they were."

"Not," said Charles casually, "Mrs. Destrier."

Sandys shot a keen glance at him, to meet the blankest of masks. "Fox-Browne, you've got a knack of putting your finger on the spot, haven't you? 'Frightened' is certainly the wrong word to use about Lesley Destrier. She's not frightened, but she's anxious. As I'm gossiping such a hell of a lot, I can tell you why. Les-

ley Destrier was Lesley Mallory. Six years ago she married Conway Destrier, who was—and may still be for that matter—E. L.-G.'s nephew. E. L.-G.'s sister Grace married Maurice Destrier, the explorer; and Conway was their only son. Conway turned out a hundred per cent. rotter. I don't think his wife can have had five minutes' happiness from when she married him in 1923, until a couple of years ago when she divorced him. He's believed to be still alive but nobody's quite sure. E. L.-G. simply regards him as dead and openly says that she's thankful. After the divorce—and before it, for that matter—she did interest herself, and I must say very benevolently, in Lesley. And now Conway's slung his hook and there's no money left and so E. L.-G. fills the rôle—which is the one she likes best—of Lady Bountiful. According to law, Conway Destrier owes his wife something like three thousand pounds. I'm not talking about alimony and that sort of thing, I'm talking about money of hers that he had and squandered.

"Now, Lesley Destrier's a very clever and independent-minded young woman. If she had her three thousand pounds, she knows exactly what she'd do with it. She's got it all planned out. But she hasn't got her three thousand pounds, and she'd like her three thousand pounds. Some time last year there was talk, started by E. L.-G. herself, of her lending Lesley the money. But since then, she's changed her mind. . . . I can tell you why." Sandys's words were coming very quick now. He seemed to be relieving over-wrought nerves by revelling in his own indiscretion. He said:

"She's changed her mind because she knows that if she lent the money, it's ninety to one that Lesley Destrier would make her scheme go, and if she made her scheme go, the money would be re-paid in about two years. And then Mrs. Conway Destrier would owe

nothing whatsoever, except gratitude for past favours, to Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene and Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene would rather—far rather—continue to be Lady Bountiful and see her protégès unhappy than finish being Lady Bountiful and make them happy. . . . Nasty thing to say, what? In fact, I should think you must be thinking I'm a pretty nasty piece of work altogether, Fox-Browne. . . . I'm sorry."

Charles pulled at his pipe. "Don't mind me," he said round its stem.

Sandys suddenly smiled. "I don't," he said. "That's why I blew off steam on you. Never mind. Forget it. It's done me a lot of good." He looked at the watch on his wrist. "My God! I've been cackling away here for nearly quarter of an hour. Wonder if the 'phone's been going." He turned on his heel and with his light, rapid stride crossed the room and was gone.

Charles, looking at his own watch, found that the time was twenty-five minutes past four and sauntered after. He reached the office, whose door was open, just in time to hear the sound with whose effect upon Sandys he could already sympathise—the angry, blaring buzz of the private telephone.

"Yes . . ." said Sandys into it. "Yes . . . Yes . . . Very well . . . No, I haven't seen her to-day. . . . Would you like me to find her? . . . Very well." He put the receiver back upon its hook, this time with an exaggerated gentleness more suggestive of desire for violence than any slam would have been. He turned to find Charles standing in the doorway.

It seemed to Charles that Sandys's recent outburst of indiscretion had indeed done him good. There was no longer any suggestion of pallor about his face and the look in the brown eyes was once more that characteristic one of barely concealed mirth.

"Seconds out of the ring!" he said. "On my right,

Battling Greene, All-England Champion, on my left; Skinny Barratt. . . . In other words, Pursell's finished. One down, t'other come up. 'Mr. Sandys!'—Mr. Sandys, if you please!—'Will you kindly ask Mrs. Barratt to go to the study immediately!' Battle, murder and sudden death!''

6

Tea was a melancholy enough meal, served in the great hall. Throughout the first half of the lingering twenty minutes or so which it took, the atmosphere was pregnant with forebodings that the hostess might descend. But she did not, and gradually tension wore off and chatter which had been spasmodic and forced grew more natural. Behind a barrier of table and tea-cups, Gladys Lester-Greene kept gloomy silence, but she was not, it seemed, a strong enough character to spread her gloom for long. Even Charles broke silence once or twice, being urged by Sandys into mild argument concerning the pleasures of winter sporting as against those of any type of hunting into which horse-flesh came.

Beside Charles as he sat with his left side to the fire, was Lesley Destrier. He noted, without seeming to look, that the colour in her cheeks was higher, that her manner was gay with a hard and forced vivacity and that her eyes were bright with present anger and a little swollen with what must have been recent tears. He did not speak to her although, out of all these people, she was the only person to whom he would have liked to speak. He did not, to tell the truth, dare, He felt—and was astonished to find himself pained to feel—like a boy reproved by the object of his first calf love. He was, he found with a certain grim amusement, definitely afraid. She was talking to Claude Lester, who stood,

his back to the fire, drinking whisky and soda in preference to tea. He, too, was gay with a hard, forced gaiety. Behind the hot, brown eyes, Charles thought he could see a smouldering and violent and yet ineffectual anger.

Sandys moved here and there, fetching and carrying and conversing—the perfect social engineer.

Facing the fire, her long, thin, dark-clad form seeming to melt into the huge leather arm-chair in which she sat, Maud Vassar behaved more humanly than Charles had imagined possible. Gone were the closed eyes and gone, too, the air of mysticism. She became, for the last quarter of the time which had begun so badly but which now was being bravely brought to a nearly successful conclusion, a delightful and intelligent and mischievously witty *grande dame*.

Charles finished his second cup of tea; a cup which he had taken not because he wanted it—for mostly he disliked tea—but because, like a boy, he felt that he could bear his fear better if he had something to do with his hands and face. To him came Sandys, who leaned over his chair to say softly:

"E. L.-G. asked me to get you to come up as soon as you'd finished. Said she was sorry she'd kept you hanging about."

"Right!" said Charles. Unobtrusive, he rose and crossed to the foot of the staircase. Behind him he could hear—as if his ears were tuned only for the one out of so many voices—the deep, soft, full yet clear tones of Lesley Destrier. He did not know—how could he tell?—that although she was still talking, her eyes, willy-nilly, had followed him. If he had seen their expression, he would have been puzzled, as, indeed, was their owner. There was something in their look of many mixed emotions, but the topmost was still cold resentment.

Charles mounted the staircase and came up into the wide lobby of the first floor. There passed him, shuffling aside like sheep, four workmen, capped and overcoated. He saw, as he passed them, that the doors of the palm court were shut and, as he drew near and could see through their glass, that metamorphosis was complete. The palm court was ready. Into his mind there flashed once more a memory of the first two chapters of *Paradise for Two* and, for the second time today, he smiled a little wryly at the thought.

He pushed open the left-hand of the swing doors of the palm court and made for the study door. While he was yet three paces from it, it was opened and there stepped out the tall and sombre figure of the housekeeper. Charles prepared his face for a smile. But he might, as he found at once, have saved himself the trouble. If the woman saw him, she gave no sign. Her mouth was shut in a line so hard that it seemed as if she were lipless. Her blue eyes, narrowed to frowning slits, seemed to spray angry fire before her as she walked. The little wads of muscle at the corners of her angular jaw stood out beneath her pasty skin like pebbles.

Charles stood aside and she passed him with a smooth, silent walk, the only sound of her progress being a subdued rustle from the silk of her decorous skirts and a faint jingle from the keys which were somewhere about her person.

Charles pursed his lips into a soundless whistle, took two paces forward and tapped at the study door. Hearing from somewhere beyond the door a faint 'Come in,' he entered, closing the door behind him.

He stood in a large room which would have been a pure quadrilateral had it not been for a piece set back three-quarters of the way down the outer wall—the setback which formed the recession of the latter half of

the east wing in the façade of the building. It was like all the rooms in the house, very high. For three-quarters of its height it was panelled with what, even to the lay eye, was a very fine example indeed of oak panelling. Above the panelling the walls and ceiling were white. In the centre of the room was a broad, wide, low table of astonishing length behind which, to face the door, with the light behind her, sat Enid Lester-Greene in a high-backed, long-armed, oaken chair. Beneath his feet was a carpet of voluptuous thick softness which covered the entire floor. Before the high, arched hearth, which had in it, upon either side of the wrought-iron fire casket, a settle upon which two people could easily sit, stood a deep leather arm-chair bigger even than its fellows in the hall below; and upon the other side—the side nearest to the door—a high-backed, exquisitely carved, rush-seated chair, fellow to the one in which its owner sat. Upon the far wall, to each side of the high, wide, leaded window, were book-cases reaching from ceiling to floor. Before the left-hand book-case, as Charles faced it, was a short librarian's ladder. From the centre of the white ceiling, there hung, by four great chains of some metal which gleamed like silver, a huge bowl of faintly rose-coloured alabaster from within which a powerful light diffused over the room a soft yet brilliant glow. As if this were not enough—and perhaps it might not have been, so large was the room—peach-coloured light was sent softly upwards from lamps set behind and beneath what seemed like the top of the panelling but was really a cunningly added trough. Against the wall to his left was a long oaken bench with carved back and long arms ending in the lion-heads of the Plantagenets. Behind and to the left of the owner of the room, as she sat to face the door, was a curiously turretted screen covered in silk of a heavy, dully gleaming gold brocade, but this

screen was pushed to one side and beyond it Charles could see a vast day-couch, covered in black silk, with, at its head, a mass of crimson pillows and, by its head, a small table upon which there stood a square clock of gold and a one-hand telephone, own brother to the one which stood upon the desk next to the main telephone and to the one which was in Sandy's office below. To each side of the jutting fireplace, standing in the recesses formed by the jut, were six-feet high wrought-iron brazier-holders, and upon the wall facing the fireplace was a hanging tapestry whose faded gentle colours, brilliant still despite the fading, showed, with that charming and alluring disregard for perspective and reality which so strangely pleases the eye of to-day's onlooker, St. Michael and his incredible steed at close grips with a Monster. Upon the right-hand wall, stretching from the door to the nearer edge of the tapestry and from the far edge of the tapestry to the foot of the couch, were more book shelves, reaching from floor to a line midway between ground and lighting trough. In them, as in the two high book shelves at the far end of the room, there gleamed, pleasantly in the gentle light, bindings of many deep, rich colours. Upon the shelf formed by the top of these low book-cases there stood in splendid isolation, one upon each side of the tapestry, two great bronze urns identical in their outline, which was at once bulging and beautiful, but varying pleasantly in their curiously shaped, fantastically crowned heads. The white and violet and crimson flame from the log fire blended with the soft, even peach of the man-made lighting so that the whole great room was sombrely reflecting from its fine appointments these gay colours; and reflecting them so that their crudity was tempered and moderated to rich and dignified beauty.

Charles, having shut the door behind him, walked to

the island of table. Behind it, his employer, gracious, rose to meet him. As he had first entered, he had seen —or thought to see—deep lines about the heavy mouth and creases between the brows. But now, as she came forward, these were gone. She smiled like a Queen Regent resolved at all costs to be pleasant to a new but possibly powerful feudal lord. She walked to the hearth and stood with her back to the flaming logs in their iron basket. She said, waving a white, fat, short-fingered hand towards the big table:

"Will you smoke, Mr. Fox-Browne? There are cigarettes in those two boxes. The gold box Turkish. The silver box Virginian."

Charles shook his head. "Thank you, no." But following the glance from the small, bright eyes, he said: "Can I get you one?"

"Virginian please. . . . Thank you. . . ." He held a light for her and again, still graciousness voluminously personified, she thanked him. She waved him to a chair but he did not choose to see the gesture. He remained standing. Their eyes were very nearly on a level.

"I really am so sorry, Mr. Fox-Browne," said the regal voice, "that I have so disgracefully kept you kicking your heels all day. I am sure you must be angry with me for not letting you at least make a preliminary survey of our land."

Charles, politely smiling, said nothing.

The small eyes seemed to search his face. "But the fact is, Mr. Fox-Browne, that I've had rather a worrying day to-day. A new house; a large house party, and all that sort of thing, means distraction from work and when I get distracted from my work I am afraid I am liable to get—how shall I put it?—well, irritable. Now, I'd like you to be a very nice man indeed and agree to not talking at all about business, but just to regard yourself as an ordinary guest until to-morrow morning

at eleven o'clock sharp, when I have asked Mr. Sandys to bring you up here to have a talk. . . . How will that suit you?" The last five words were spoken on the gleefully rising, artificial tone which is so frequently used to children by those who never have and never will understand them.

Charles bowed. He said, in duty bound: "That will suit me admirably."

"Splendid!" said Enid Lester-Greene. "Splendid!" The adjective was unctuous indeed as she said it. "I take it then, Mr. Fox-Browne, that we shall start work, so far as you are concerned, from eleven o'clock to-morrow? In the meantime, I sincerely hope that you will find yourself happy and comfortable at Friar's Pardon."

Charles, always intolerant of the unnecessary, bowed again but did not speak. He sought about in his mind for ways to take the *congé* which he was not yet certain had been delivered, but before he could find one, the high-pitched and self-satisfied voice was speaking again.

"There's one thing, Mr. Fox-Browne, that I should like to speak to you about," it said. "You are, I can see for myself, a man of experience and shrewd common sense. . . . Now, you cannot, after this afternoon's rather undignified debacle in the drawing-room when I regrettably let my intensity of interest carry me away almost to the point of bad manners to my household, but be aware that there is a certain spirit in this house which . . . which . . . which . . ." The richness of the tone and the ponderous but fluent periods of the speech seemed to die away simultaneously.

Charles, from good manners, good sense, and a desire to keep close to this odd but interesting menage, put in his word. "I understand," he said, with an effort smoothing out the habitual concentration of his speech

into more polished periods. " You mean, Mrs. Lester-Greene, that the legendary reputation of this house has got on the nerves of some of the members of the household."

She flashed at him a brilliant but, he felt, a rather unwilling smile; brilliant because he had helped her, and unwilling because it seemed wrong to her innermost mind that any one should be able to put into words, more easily than Enid Lester-Greene herself, Enid Lester-Greene's intention. She said, after a small pause:

" Exactly, Mr. Fox-Browne. Now, to be perfectly frank with you, I had been relying for support in the common sense attitude upon Mr. Sandys, but I am afraid that poor man has been lately so much overworked—I am a perfect glutton for work, you know, when I get started and, I am afraid, very inconsiderate to others—I'm afraid he has been so overworked that his nerves have got the better of him and allowed him to become tainted with the point of view of the others. . . . To put it into a nutshell, Mr. Fox-Browne, I want to know whether you will enter into a secret alliance with me "—she smiled so coyly that Charles had difficulty in preventing himself from obvious recoil—" enter into an alliance with me," she said, " to put common sense, where it should be, on the top. This, Mr. Fox-Browne, is a *nice* house. This, as you may or may not have heard me say before, is my dream house and I will not, I will *not*, I say, have my tenancy of it upset by the repercussions of a lot of old wives' tales. Undoubtedly the stories are odd and equally undoubtedly the nerves of the present members of the household and house party have so played upon them that certain ordinary events have assumed the sinister appearance of what Lady Maud—one of my dearest friends, Mr. Fox-Browne, but a visionary with whose viewpoint I cannot

and will not agree—would call psychic phenomena. Now, I want you to keep your ears, which I am sure will hear a great deal, and your eyes, which I am sure will see even more . . . to promise to tell me anything of this sort which they see and hear. Naturally, of course, if anything odd should happen to you, you are equally to come and tell me about it." The voice was, in an amazing blend, both confidential and regally commanding.

Again Charles played up. "Most certainly I understand you, Mrs. Lester-Greene," he said. "And most certainly I shall let you know of anything at all which I feel that you ought to know." A dangerous equivocation, this. But it is safe to say that the woman saw nothing in it save acquiescence to her wish. She took a stub of cigarette from her holder and threw it behind her into the blazing logs. She said, the queen relaxing before a newly favoured courtier:

"What do you think of my den, Mr. Fox-Browne?"

Mr. Fox-Browne made suitable laudatory noises not altogether assumed.

"This, you know," said majesty, "was originally two rooms and the whole of this and the next floor of this wing was sealed up when I bought the house. But being like yourself, Mr. Fox-Browne, a person of common sense, I could not stand nonsense like that. All these beautiful rooms shut for rats and damp and time to feast upon their beauty and gradually to reduce to . . . to . . ." The great artist snapped her fingers in the air and laughed a little. "I'm so sorry. When I have been working hard, the right word sometimes persists in eluding me. . . . What was I talking about?" She put her hand to her brow with a gesture not altogether ineffective. "Oh, yes! This room was originally two rooms: the great bedroom in which the head of the

Charles looked at her. The dark eyes met his steadily but the dark-skinned, Egyptian face seemed a little paler than when he last had seen it. He grunted. He took one step to the left and two forward and then knelt down opposite the massive gilt frame and daubed canvas. His fingers sought about and quickly found the ends of the thick wire which had held the picture on to its two hooks; hooks which had clawed with their upper curve deep into the solid picture rail which formed the line of demarcation between be-flowered wall paper and white-washed upper wall. He bent low over the ends of the wire. No jagged tear here; no sign of constant fraying, but rather, save only for one thin strand, a clean severing. The one strand was bent and, to his microscopic eye, torn rather than cut. But all the other strands were severed clean. He grunted again, noncommitally. He straightened suddenly and his grey, cold gaze squarely met the wide-eyed brown gaze of Juno.

"Can't understand it at all, sir," Juno said. "That I can't! . . . It's queer like!"

Charles was brusquely genial. "Always happening with this picture wire. Always flaws." He stopped and, picking up the heavy picture, straightened it as easily as if it had been a toy. "Suppose," he said, "we put him up here and you run off and let me dress and while we're down at dinner you can get some one to hang it up again or take it away. Don't mind which . . . Thank you. . . ."

Instead of turning and at once leaving the room, Juno stood for a full moment, which seemed longer than its actual length, while her eyes remained steadfast upon his. And then, just as he was about to say something else, she turned abruptly—even rudely—upon her heels and was gone.

Charles, in a few swift strides, was at the door and

turning the key in the lock. He went back to the picture. Once more his fingers sought and found the severed ends of the thick twisted wire. Once more he looked over them, holding them this way and that against the light. And then, as suddenly as he had picked them up, he dropped them and began a tour of his room.

It was not difficult to find his clothes. They were each in its obvious place. He stripped and, with the help of the little bathroom, was bathed and dressed within fifteen decisive but leisurely minutes.

Looking into the big glass above his dressing-table, he gave a final, unnecessary twitch to his tie. And then, his eyes going involuntarily to the picture standing to the near side of the fireplace, he left the room, switching out the light and shutting the door behind him. He made no sound. He was always in all his movements a quiet man.

He stood a moment outside his door and then, memory coming back to him of his talk with the lonely Mrs. Barratt, went down into the main corridor and walked straight along it. Crossing the great lobby, of which the right-hand side was now the palm court, and coming into the eastern wing—the wing which upon this floor and the next had been sealed up since the death of Henry Deaves in 1808—he passed the study and big room on the left which must be Lesley Destrier's, and so came to the cross passage corresponding with his own at the other end of the house. Sandys's bedroom, he remembered, was on the far side of the left arm of the cross passage. That is, if Mrs. Barratt had told him the truth, and why should she not?

He turned left, expecting to find anything save that which, immediately upon his turning, met his eye.

Just within the mouth of the cross passage were a man and a woman standing sideways to him. The

man's figure, black-clothed and white-cuffed was, he knew at once, that of Sandys. The woman's, black-frocked and with traces showing of useless and charmingly belaced apron, was that of the singer of *Mironton Mirontaine*. Sandys's arms were about her shoulders.

But almost simultaneously with Charles's turning of the corner, there was a straining back of the small figure of Thérèse and the right arm of Thérèse was lifted, and the fingers of Thérèse, with a ringing smack, left their staring red mark mercilessly upon the flushed cheek of Mr. Norman Sandys. And a volley of French, followed by a volley of mixed French and English, followed by a volley of most English, albeit comically spoken, abuse, broke from the mouth which the lips of Norman Sandys had been, apparently, so eager to reach. With a little lithe rush, so fast that Charles felt the displacement of air which it caused, Thérèse was gone and he was left face to face with Sandys.

Sandys, for a fleeting instant, showed his white teeth in something reminiscent of a snarl; but then concealed it by biting at his lower lip.

It was no use for Charles to pretend that he had not seen. Apart from all else, the left hand of Sandys went up to caress, with tender, consoling fingers, the four livid bars upon his cheek.

And then Sandys laughed. He said, and in his tone there was an appealing mixture of anxiety and friendliness:

"Awkward sort of devil, aren't you? . . . Do you know, Fox-Browne, I just came out of my room and there was that little vixen. And for the first time I saw what a damn attractive little bit she was. And I said: 'Evening, Thérèse!' and she rolled those eyes at me and I thought it was an invitation. . . . And then, as you saw, I found that if it was it was a fake." With speech, Sandys's self-assurance seemed to come

back to him. He said, after a pause in which Charles, though not forbiddingly, remained silent:

"To what, Mr. Charles Fox-Browne, do I owe the honour of this visit to the 'aunted wing?" His jauntiness was an admirable example of self-control triumphing over regret for the past and anxiety for the future.

Charles said: "Got a cigarette? . . . Thanks. . . . Match? . . . Thanks." And then: "Matter of fact I've had a visit from the poltergeist." He told, in sentences often of three and never more than five words, of Juno and the picture.

Sandys stared at him with dark eyes widening. "Well, I'm damned!" he said, and began to laugh. "And what, Oh, Sceptic, do you think of that?"

For by no means the first time that day, Charles answered: "I'd like notice of that question. . . . Thought I'd mention it to you though. . . . One question: Juno local?"

Sandys stared. "What's that? . . . Oh, I get you. Can't say." He broke off and stared again. "I'll find out though. Let you know in the morning. . . . If we get down now"—he came forward and took Charles's left elbow in his right hand—"we'll get in first with the cocktails." Once more his left hand groped up to his cheek, its finger-tips tenderly caressing. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

PARADISE FOR ONE

I

THERE were cocktails, skilfully made by Sandys and with a touch of genius by Pursell, in the billiard room. There was also more of the surpassing sherry. The three men were the earliest arrivals, Pursell coming down only two or three minutes after Charles and

Sandys. Charles watched Pursell's eyes as he argued with Sandys over the right proportion of French Vermouth for a *Smile Duchesse*. But Pursell's glance did not linger with any curiosity upon the now almost faded claw marks of Mademoiselle Thérèse Gautier.

The women began to come down: first Gladys, looking sallower and more bent than ever in a frock which upon most other women would have been admirable; then Maud Vassar; then the hostess, more jewelled than Charles had yet seen her and patently proud of much over-plump white back; and last, in a gown of black velvet whose seeming simplicity was but the measure of its artistry, Lesley Destrier. Charles ordered his eyes to keep away from her but they disobeyed. And it was he who, at her refusal to both Sandys and Pursell of a cocktail, poured out and gave to her a glass of sherry.

As she took the glass her fingers brushed against Charles's. The skin of them was very soft, and cold like ice. And, like ice, it burnt him. . . . But she smiled; not a smile of convention and good manners, but a warm and friendly smile. Charles felt the blood rush to his head. He turned away, astonished almost to the point of being aghast at the incredibly youthful behaviour of his emotions. But as a few moments later they went in to dinner, he became grateful to those emotions however adolescent they might be. For the dark grey, impalpable but definite veil of depression which had been over his spirit since before tea was now miraculously dissolved.

Dinner—no doubt because most of its eaters had been dreading it—was, from the first, a pleasant and cheerful meal. All traces of her earlier displeasure had vanished from the hostess. She was, although all the time slightly pompous and even, to Charles's mind, a little too much in the Olympian manner, charming and

gracious and even amusing. And the food was even better than it had been at lunch. And the wines were beyond criticism and handled with due lavishness.

The only one of the company who continued to wear the afternoon's cloak of gloom was Gladys. And to her, Charles noted, no one paid much attention. She sat, as she had sat at lunch, staring down at plate after plate and all the glasses at her place remained dry.

For the rest, Claude Lester, after many searching and at first incredulous glances at his sister at the head of the table, began to drink freely. With wine and talk and good food he became a different person, so that even Charles began to see a certain charm in the man. Sandys, no longer faced by the necessity of distributing oil upon angry waves, talked less than Charles had believed possible, but he was benign and bland and occasionally witty. Pursell, like Claude Lester, did not stint himself of wine. He beamed—even at his hostess—his monocle flashing, and the true notes of his deep, rich baritone were a perpetual obligato to the meal. Lesley Destrier, like Sandys opposite to her, was silent but silent without gloom. Charles, anxious to solidify the frankness he had felt before dinner, ached to talk with her but was prevented from anything save the briefest and most occasional remark by the sudden loquacity, upon his other side, of Maud Vassar. Maud Vassar, as she had been at tea, was mundanely entertaining. Charles, although good-mannered and even at times appreciative in spite of himself, wished her anywhere but at this table.

Not once during the whole of the rather long meal was there mention of or reference to those matters which had so disturbed the peace of the household earlier in the day. But Charles did notice that beside the great doors there stood warden the tall, now black-clad figure of Juno—the housemaid Gertrude Fenner. He

found time, between Maud Vassar's monologues, to wonder whose generalship this might be and to decide, by reason of the many glances which he saw the man send towards the doors, that it was Seton's.

But the doors, like properly behaved doors, remained shut. The courses came and went. The glasses diminished in number until only port beakers remained. . . . The two parlourmaids vanished with a quiet fluttering and, fully regal once more, Enid Lester-Greene collected her women.

"We will see you," she said, looking round at the standing men with the day's final triumph thickening her voice, "in the Palm Court."

2

The palms stood tall and grotesque in their tubs, their long and gracefully impossible fronds making upon the flagged floor an irregular lattice of insubstantial shadow. At the far end of the court, beneath the wall of leaded window, a great sloping bank, cunningly and almost invisibly boxed-in, bloomed with the vivid green of ferns and the yellow and bronze and magenta of giant chrysanthemums. Radiating from somewhere above the giant palm in the centre, were invisible cords stretched diagonally to each corner of the court and along these cords, at intervals of an inch or so, hung tiny fairy lamps of every shade. At each corner of the court were tall bronze lamps having the twisted boles of palms with, for their efflorescence, heads of many-branched and entwined globes each with a softly bright effulgence. Among the palms, some full in light, some deep in shadow and some in both shadow and light, were little tables each of a different colour, and about each table, multi-coloured like the tables, were graceful but inviting chairs.

The eight people of the party sat about the two central tables. At one, Enid Lester-Greene had around her Maud Vassar and Charles, her daughter and Pursell. At the other, pushed up close until the two tables were almost as one, sat Sandys and Claude Lester and Lesley Destrier. Every now and then, between and during her sips of coffee, Enid Lester-Greene looked about her, repressing, not too successfully, sighs of satisfaction. Talk continued but it was neither so loud nor so spontaneous as that of dinner. There seemed to creep back over the party, in this place, a shadow of previous tension.

It may be that to the hostess, who had her moments of social genius, the time seemed ripe for the withdrawal of her dominating self. She rose and the feet of her wicker chair squeaked not unkindly upon the flags. She said, looking down and round at her guests and family:

"I am so sorry. . . . I should like to stay with you all, but"—a little laugh, half-deprecatory, half self-laudatory and wholly self-revelatory, broke her sentence—"but I *must* work! I don't know"—she looked at Sandys—"what you dear people will do to amuse yourselves. . .." She paused and Sandys, taking his cue, put in his word. He said, rising:

"I'm sure our bridge fiends would like to play." He looked about him approvingly. "And very probably like to play here. That leaves—as I shall be working as well—two people over. Mercifully though, they're enthusiastic billiard players."

"Oh!" said Pursell, beaming. "Ah . . . Yes. . . ." To add immediately, with a thread of anxiety marking the previous joviality of his tone: "What about you, Fox-Browne? Like to finish that game?"

Charles nodded. "Certainly." His voice was

hearty enough but he had to make effort to keep his eyes from the black-gowned figure at the other table whose white shoulder was close to his own black-clad one and whose voice—for during coffee he had freed himself from the monologues of Maud Vassar—was still echoing soft and deep in his ears.

Enid Lester-Greene stood straight and massive and more than a little pompous. She looked about her with her regal smile. She said: "Splendid! Splendid!" Her eyes left persons and went to things, glowing in one soul-appraising, half-circular glance over the beauties of her latest toy. "Is there a card-table up here, Norman?"

Sandys nodded and busied himself in the far south western corner of the court where a table had leant folded and unseen against the wall. He pulled it out and set it up beneath one of the great standard lamps and some three feet or so to the nearside of the fern-and-chrysanthemum bank. Round it he stood four chairs and upon its top of black cut silk he placed, brought from some receptacle beneath the table, two new packs of cards and four markers. He stood and surveyed his work with satisfaction, his head a little on one side. He came back to the group in the centre. He said, waving his hand with the air of a *prestidigitateur*:

"*Voila!* . . ." He addressed himself to Maud Vassar. "I think I've put you in the best place. Everybody's warm, everybody's got light and there's a bell in the corner of the fern bank. . . . Perhaps your luck will turn, Lady Maud, playing in a new place."

With her slow stride which just escaped being the ponderous waddle of the over-laced, Enid Lester-Greene stepped over to the card table. Her arms made a little gesture as if she were about to rub her hands together; a gesture which was restrained. Again she said: "Splendid! Splendid!" She came back, as Sandys

had, to the group. "And you, Trevor,"—she beamed upon him—"are going to play your favourite game with Mr. Fox-Browne? . . . Now, I can leave you all with a happy heart, and *please*"—she raised a fat forefinger in roguish admonition—"please don't let any one interrupt me. . . . Do you know what I am trying to do? I am trying to finish the work I am on now so that I can devote all the more time to making you dear people happy and comfortable. . . . I shall be working, I expect, until the early hours so I shall probably not see any of you—except poor Norman here—until lunch time to-morrow. . . . Good-night, Maud! Good-night, Trevor! Good-night, everybody, and pleasant dreams!"

She swept to the study door, opened it, stood on the threshold to have one last look at her palm court, and was gone.

There was silence for a moment or so after her exit, but before it became uncomfortable there was a general movement. The bridge players, led by Maud Vassar, and with Claude Lester, rather hang-dog, bringing up the rear, moved over to their corner. Sandys, with a resigned and rather weary shrug of his shoulders, disappeared after his employer into the study, and Pursell, his monocle flashing with anticipation, led Charles, who strove to deny to himself his reluctance, to the stairs.

3

Pursell, with an amazing cannon and in-off, ran out.

"Shot!" said Charles.

"What about a final?" Pursell's eagerness was pathetic. "Just a hundred?"

"Right," said Charles.

Pursell placed the balls. "You bung off."

Charles, put on his metal by his third defeat in one

day, began to play better billiards than, as he well knew, he was really capable of. The score mounted and points crept up and up. Pursell sixty. Charles sixty-five . . . Pursell seventy-eight. Charles seventy . . . Pursell seventy-eight. Charles eighty . . .

They were interrupted just as Charles, suddenly foozling in the midde of a break which might have taken him out, had brought his score to ninety-four. Sandys, paler than usual, with dark half-moons of fatigue beneath his eyes, wandered disconsolate in to them. They grunted at him. He stood, hands in pockets, rocking gently from heel to toe, and watched them play.

Pursell, starting from eighty-eight, ran out with an unfinished break of fifteen. Regretfully he put his cue, after an unanswered look of mute appeal, back into its case. They put cues and balls away and covered the table.

"Good," said Sandys with satisfaction. "What you doing now?"

"I suppose," said Pursell, "we go upstairs to the winter garden thingummy and get all Barrie and join the ladies, what?"

Sandys shook his head. "Bad idea, Pursell! Anyhow, they're sure to be in the middle of a rubber and if there's one thing worse than playing bridge—I imagine you agree with me—it's watching other people trying to play it."

Pursell laughed; a sound like a neigh of a musical horse. "Quite," he said. "Absolutely! Perfect agreement with you. What I say is bridge is all very well for those who like it. But I'm not one of those who likes it. There are very few indoor games, to tell you the truth, that I do like."

Charles grinned suddenly. "Don't, by any chance, care for billiards?"

"I'll tell you what to do," said Sandys. "Here am I stuck at the end of a telephone—or supposed to be. In other words, I've got to stick in my office there in case E. L.-G. wants anything. She's not dictating to-night, she's writing. But she's got a way of ringing me up for references and things and I'm supposed to be on tap. But . . ." he looked first at Charles and then at Pursell—"but, my men, I've got hidden away among my most important files a game that'll make your mouths water. I've also got a bell in the room and by ringing the bell I can get Seton and by getting Seton we can get something to drink and by dismissing Seton after we've got something to drink, we can get just the right atmosphere, Fox-Browne, for Pursell to tell us exactly what misadventures befell the young lady of Troon."

Pursell, whose face, as usual a mirror to his ever transient emotions, had visibly lengthened at the mention of palm courts and bridge, cheered up. "Very sound, workable sort of a notion!" he said "Come on, Fox-Browne!" And Fox-Browne, willy-nilly, went on. He, too, did not care for bridge. And though, in spite of this dislike of the best card game—according to some—in the world, he would much have preferred to go to palm court rather than office, he disciplined himself.

They filed down the billiard-room, Sandys leading, Charles behind Pursell. Just before Sandys, at the door, switched off the light, Charles glanced at the clock above the arched fireplace of red brick, to see that its hands, although he had imagined they would show at least a quarter past ten, stood only at ten minutes to that hour.

4

The game which Sandys had "hidden away among

his most important files " proved to be, to Pursell's undisguised joy—for he had been, not so many years ago, the champion of Oxford and its surrounding villages —and to Charles's relief, for he, too, like many otherwise intelligent persons enjoyed it, a Shove-Ha'penny Board of beautiful balance, age and polish, with its dividing lines, in true championship style, of lifting brass. Now, five minutes after their entry into the long narrow room brightly lit and cheerfully warmed by a log fire reaching, it seemed, half-way up the chimney, the board was set out upon Charles's table and Pursell was heading Sandys by three full decks.

Charles, alternating between table and mantel, where there rested his whisky and soda, was happy—or not—(he could not quite make out which) to be here rather than upstairs and exposed more fully to the curious recurrences of this adolescent self which, since his entry into this house, he had so astonishingly discovered. . . .

" You may," said Sandys, polishing a copper disc upon the elbow of his coat, " think you're very hot, Pursell, but just wait for this!" He put his " ha'penny " upon the edge of the board, bent forward and drew back his right hand to strike; and then, before it had come into contact with the disc, pulled it back again. The buzzing of the private telephone had suddenly filled the room.

" Oh, damn!" said Sandys under his breath. He crossed to his own table and lifted the instrument. " Yes," he said. " Oh, I see. . . . Hold on a minute, please." He went to a pile of type-written sheets upon his table and sitting down in his chair which he pulled up to him with an impatient hitch of his foot, began with deft fingers to flick over the pages. He found very soon what he was searching for. Rising with the page in his hand he reached for the telephone again. " Hullo!" he said. " No, it wasn't at Sandridge's that

Gordon Bellamy first saw Arabelle. It was at the Studio. Page 26. Gordon was at the Studio because he had driven Lady Violet down there . . . Yes . . . Oh, no, not at all! I don't mind how long I stay up . . . Thank you." He replaced the receiver, glanced at his watch and came back to the shove-ha'penny board.

"I," he said, "am in for a long night. Thank God for such panaceas as this. Watch me now, Pursell, and I'll show you how shove-ha'penny really should be played!"

But Pursell, as he had beaten Charles at billiards, beat Sandys at shove-ha'penny. And Charles, though it was perhaps seven years since he had played, also beat Sandys. Sandys was comically rueful. He mixed himself a drink and brought drink to the others and made them play each other. Charles and Pursell went very levelly. Half-way through the game, Charles looked at his watch and, throwing his usual reticence to the winds, voiced a larger part than usual of his thoughts. He said to Sandys while Pursell was playing:

"How long does that bridge four generally go on?"

Sandys glanced at him sharply; Charles could not be sure whether or no with that semi-suppressed twinkle in the dark eyes. "All depends," said Sandys. "Maudie's usually the first to pack up. She says she has to have plenty of sleep. Personally I think she sits at her window looking out for spooks."

There came a howl from Pursell. "Look at that! Another full house. Come on, Fox-Browne, come and shove a beautiful 'a'penny. You'll need to!"

Charles went to the board. Pursell stood between him and Sandys, frowning down with pleased concentration.

Sandys took out his watch. "Tell you what, Fox-Browne," he said, "I'll go up and see how they're getting on. Keep your ear on the 'phone for me, Pur-

sell, while he's playing." He walked on quick feet to the door and was gone. And immediately after the door shut, the telephone rang.

"It would!" Pursell said. For a second he waited hopeful, but Charles, bending down to study the angle of his first two ha'pennies, made no more. Pursell shrugged his shoulders, took the monocle from his eye and crossed to the private telephone. He lifted it.

"Hul . . ." he said, and that was all. The second syllable of the word never came out.

Charles looked up; looked up to see, across the room, a white-faced Pursell with suddenly staring eyes and down-dropped jaw. . . .

There came the sound of running feet from outside and atop of the sound Sandys entered. "'Phone?" he began, and then he, too, cut himself short.

Pursell was saying: "Hullo? . . . Hullo? . . . *Hullo!* What's that? *HULLO!* . . ."

The telephone dropped from his hand. He turned the white face, mouth now set in a thin line, to the other two men.

"*Come* on!" he said, and made for the door in a leap, brushing Sandys aside. For the fraction of a second the eyes of Charles and Sandys met, in each astonished interrogation, and then pell-mell they bundled out after the running Pursell. They caught him half-way up the stairs. He jerked out over his shoulder as he scrambled up the oaken treads:

"Help. . . . Help. . . She said: 'For God's sake help!'"

5

They came to the top of the stairs with Pursell still leading. But on the straight, across the stair lobby to the doors of the palm court, both Charles and Sandys gained upon him. They burst through the doors of the palm

court with Charles leading, Sandys second and Pursell last. Charles, his fingers to the handle of the study door, leant his weight against the lock as will a man in a hurry who expects the door to open. But this door did not open. He turned the handle the other way, only to confirm that the door was locked. He beat with his fists upon one of the oaken panels. He turned his head a little and saw Sandys at his shoulder, his face whiter even than Pursell's. He said:

"Locked. Shout! . . ." And then at the top of his voice shouted: "What's the matter? Who's there?"

Sandys and Pursell each in turn tried the handle and, having tried it, threw their ineffectual weight against the solid oak of the door. They did nothing but bruise their shoulders.

"Fox-Browne!" said Sandys. "Fox-Browne!"

But Charles had gone. He was already at the window of the palm court which was upon this near side of the bank of ferns and flowers. With one foot upon the bank and one hand upon the window catch, he hauled himself up with one lithe spring until both his feet were upon the narrow ledge beneath the window. He swung the window open and wriggled his body round it and out of it. . . .

Pursell, suddenly galvanised into life, left the study door and ran towards the window which now swung idly open letting in a sudden stream of cold, dark air.

"Come back, you fool!" His voice cracked on a high note of alarm. "Come *back!*"

At the study door Sandys was hammering, now with both fists, and shouting.

There was no answer.

Pursell, wavering between fear of what had happened to the man who had disappeared into the night and the woman who was within the room, hovered indecisive between door and window.

Through the door of the palm court there came running the black-gowned, white-shouldered figure of Lesley Destrier. One hand was at her breast. The thousand little coloured lights were answered, as she moved, by reflections from the smooth hair which was the colour of ripe corn.

Sandys went on hammering. Every now and then he shouted. "Hullo! *Hul-LO* in there. . . ."

To him rushed Lesley. "What's the matter?" she said in a harsh whisper from the back of her throat. "Oh, what is it?"

But Sandys did not hear her. He went on with fists and voice.

"I know," cried Pursell. "A ladder! Mrs. Destrier, where's a ladder? Where can I get a ladder? . . . And there's Fox-Browne out there; he can't do it! He can't do it!"

"Hullo!" shouted Sandys between thumps. "Hullo. . . . Hul-LO in there!"

The long white hands of Lesley Destrier caught him by the shoulders. "Stop!" she said. "Stop for a moment! . . Let's listen. What is it? What's the matter? . . . Listen . . ."

Sandys stopped. They bent their ears to the door. They heard no sound. But even as they straightened, there came sound as the key turned the wards of the lock and the door opened.

Charles stood looking at them. There was little blood in his face, so that his tan showed greyly pale. A handkerchief was tied roughly round his left hand; already the whiteness of the handkerchief was stained with the deep crimson of new blood.

"Come in!" he said, and pointed at Sandys. "And you," he said, and pointed at Pursell. He looked at Lesley Destrier who now stood fully to face him. Her face was dead white and now her eyes, wide-open and

staring—trying to stare past him into the room—seemed black. She was half bent forward and each hand was cupped over a breast.

"Sorry! Not you. You can't do anything. She's dead." Charles shut the door in her face, turning the key.

"Look!" he said and, turning, pointed to the far right-hand corner of the room.

"*My God!*" The words came out of Sandys in a gasp.

Pursell said nothing but his pallor seemed suddenly intensified.

Sandys, with a rush, was at the couch. Over the figure which lay so straight and tidily upon it he ran fevered fingers. In a moment Charles was at his shoulder, pulling him back. "No good," he said. "Dead. Better not touch."

In the centre of the room Pursell sat down suddenly, not upon a chair but upon the floor.

"Sorry," said Pursell. "Feel sick. . . . I say, there's the hell of a funny smell here!"

Sandys, turning from the body, impatiently twitched his shoulder away from Charles's grip. He walked out into the centre of the room and stood, hands thrust deep into his pockets, shoulders hunched forward, his dark eyes darting glances this way and that about the room. He said in answer to Pursell:

"Yes. Like . . . like pear-drops! What's in pear-drops?" He looked over his shoulder at Charles.

"Ammyl nitrite," Charles said. He pointed to the couch and the overturned table beside it. "There's a bottle of nail-polish upset there. That's full of the stuff. . . ." He seemed to be about to speak further and then changed his mind.

Sandys still looked this way and that about the room. Through the smashed window which showed how

Charles had entered from the string course, there blew fitful gusts of cold wind. The big hanging lamp in the centre of the room swayed to the gusts. But nothing else in the room moved.

Pursell climbed shakily to his feet. "Sorry!" he said and giggled; a shaky, uncertain sound not pleasant to hear. He made great effort with himself. He, too, began to look about the room. He said:

"I say! Everything's the same! What I mean, nothing's been moved out of this place or anything. Nothing's been touched." His voice was rising as he spoke; rising to a pitch far higher than fully ordered nerves would have allowed. Charles came across the room in three strides, grasped the chair which stood at the writing-table with his left hand and with his right, none too gently, thrust Pursell into it. "Sit there," he said. "And shut up!"

He looked at Sandys's back. "Sandys!" he said.

Something in his tone made the man turn at once. "The time," said Charles, "when I came in at that window, was five minutes past ten. It is now ten minutes past ten. Suppose one of us—you, I should think—gets on to that 'phone there"—he pointed to the instrument of the main line—"and tells the police at once. In the meantime, you, Pursell, when you've pulled yourself together, had better go and find Lady Maud and tell her to tell the others. Sandys, we must *not* touch anything in this room!"

Sandys nodded. His face was pale with a curious luminous paleness. His eyes were so bright that they glittered in the lamplight. He walked with quick, short steps—much shorter steps than were usual to him—to the table. He picked up the telephone and spoke.

Charles, walking side by side with a determinedly recovered Pursell, went doorwards. He opened the door and saw Pursell go through it. He himself stopped

for one instant outside the room. In one glance, his eyes took in the whole of the palm court. But she was no longer there.

He went back into the study once more, locking the door behind him. Into the telephone, Sandys, in low, urgent tones, was talking rapidly.

CHAPTER IX

PROPOSITION

ENID LESTER-GREENE—or the shell of her—lay upon her day couch. She lay straight and upon her back with ankles together and hands straight at her sides. Her eyes stared up at the ceiling in a wide, glaring stare impossible to life. Her eyeballs seemed to be starting from her head and the whites of them were white no longer but dark with the blood which had suffused behind the fragile skin of the eyes. Her face, so short a time ago coloured pleasantly by gently assisted nature, was now of a terrifying lividity save for the horribly suffused nose and lips and ears which, instead of their pink and white and redness, showed now a uniform darkness which was almost black. And black, too, were the fingers of the hands stretched down so tautly at her sides. Edging the lips and nostrils was a fine froth almost like that of soapsuds, but tinged faintly with blood.

Beside her head, the little table which had held an ash-tray, a box of cigarettes, a match stand and a copy of *Paradise for Two,* together with the telephone by which she had been used to communicate with Norman Sandys, was overturned. And this was the only sign of disturbance within the room—save, indeed, for the broken pane which showed how Charles, too late, had effected an entrance.

On the floor, a foot or so distant from the bed and

beside one of the legs of the overturned table, was the box of cigarettes—a box of silver filigree with an amethyst catch—open and upon its side. All around it lay, with an air of horrid normality, the little scattered white cylinders of tobacco. Next to it was a hand-bag of gold brocade. Escaped from the mouth of the bag were a powder case, a puff, a handkerchief and a small, square bottle, its cork beside it, which had discharged a little pool of thick and pinkish nail polish from where there arose the sweet, violently acid smell of pear-drops. Farther away, where, presumably it had rolled by reason of its roundness, was a small, round, silver ash-tray. This also was overturned, with, drooling from its mouth, the crushed, distorted ends of four cigarettes; over them a scattered heap of fine, grey ash and, just before them, a long cigarette holder of amber. The match stand lay upon its side, half-way between ash-tray and table-top, but the copy of *Paradise for Two* was upon the bed, lying tidily beneath the outer edge of the blackened left hand.

The position of all these things so far listed, save perhaps for the book, was duly and normally explained by the oversetting of the table. But the telephone was different. The telephone, which was a single hand instrument standing upon a forked base, had been, by some force or the other, most roughly handled. The base lay upon the floor directly opposite the right-hand leg of the couch foot, but the mouth-and-ear piece lay about a foot away from the bed in a line with the body's right hand. The parti-coloured twisted lead, which had once joined up to the base, had been severed, not by a clean cut, but apparently by the exertion of some sudden and tremendous force, for frayed ends of twisted wire protruded from the coloured arteries of insulation.

So much for what had once been a woman and for that small corner of this vast room in which lay what

was left of this woman. For the rest, the room, in the centre of which there stood the three men, directly under the great light-bowl of alabaster, was as it had been. No sign of disturbance; no sign of an alien hand—save always for the broken window; no mark whatsoever could any of the three find to show of any physical intrusion. . . .

The room was very quiet. Each of the men could feel the beating of his own heart and imagined, until he took command of himself, that he was hearing the beating of his neighbours'.

The room was still warm, but it was growing less warm with every moment as the gusts of cold air from the broken window dispersed stored heat. In the wrought-iron casket beneath the arched brick of the great fire-place, the logs burned low.

CHAPTER X

H_2O

I

Now there were four men in the room. Charles and Sandys and Pursell; and Archibald Willis, Detective-Inspector of the County Police.

Willis was a tall, scrawny man in the early forties. He had eyes like a badger's; a nose which, had it been any longer and thinner, would have been a deformity; a good mouth; a quiet, rather harsh voice, and a manner which was very nearly that of a gentleman. He was clean-shaven. He was in plain clothes—a suit quietly neat of mildly peppered-and-salted tweeds. His black silk tie ran through a heavy golden ring. He moved quietly but, despite the thickness of the carpet, there came every now and then a muffled squeaking from his

boots. He had an egg-like bald head, fringed by a tonsure of grey. He sat, long legs stretched out before him, upon the edge of the writing table at the side near the window and couch. He had in one hand a black, official note-book and in the other a black, private fountain pen. Beside him, upon the table, lay his watch, a massive thing of silver, richly chased. Its hands stood now at midnight.

He closed the note-book with a snap, setting it down upon the table beside his watch. He said, looking from one to the other of the three men who stood in a semi-circle before him:

"Now, gentlemen, while we wait for the surgeon, I would just like to run over, myself, what you have told me; to make one story—a sort of synopsis really—out of the three and see whether you agree with it, for by all seeming we've got a very odd business here and we can't be too careful Now, gentlemen:

"As I understand it, the household dined at the usual time, a quarter to eight. After dinner, just before nine, the ladies were taken by Mrs. Lester-Greene up to the palm court outside here where, a few minutes later—not more than fifteen and not less than ten—you gentlemen, together with Major Claude Lester, joined them. Coffee was then taken. At approximately nine-fifteen Mrs. Lester-Greene . . ." Inspector Willis paused a little in his talk. Involuntarily his eyes darted a glance at the day couch upon which lay the rigid, immobile figure. "At nine-fifteen," he repeated, "Mrs. Lester-Greene—having seen it arranged that Lady Vassar, Major Lester, Miss Lester-Greene and Mrs. Des . . . Destrier were to play bridge in the palm court; and that you two gentlemen "—he looked at Charles and Pursell —" were, to play billiards, and that you, sir," he looked at Sandys—" were, as usual, to be downstairs in your office in case she should wish to summon you—came

into this room here, having expressed the desire that, as she was going to work at her writing, she did not wish to be disturbed and would probably not see any of the party except Mr. Sandys until the next day at lunch. . . . Am I correct so far, gentlemen?"

He was answered by a nod from Charles, another from Sandys, and a "Yes, yes," from Pursell.

"The bridge party," Willis went on, "is being questioned by one of my assistants. And the rest of the household by another. When I've got their reports, I may know that some one besides Mr. Sandys, who was in here for a few minutes at the beginning, saw Mrs. Lester-Greene after her entrance into the study at nine-fifteen, either by going into the study or by reason of Mrs Lester-Greene leaving it. However, we are only at the moment dealing with the facts as known to you three gentlemen, and those are, that no one saw Mrs. Lester-Greene again." Once more the badger-like eyes flickered uncertainly and uneasily towards the couch and its burden.

"So much," he said, "for *seeing* Mrs. Lester-Greene. You did not see her, gentlemen, but you heard her. First you, Mr. Sandys, when she rang up at approximately nine-fifty-five and then you, my lord, when, Mr. Sandys just having left the room, the telephone bell went again and you heard Mrs. Lester-Greene's voice crying for help. . . . You, sir," he looked at Charles, "neither saw nor heard her after nine-fifteen?"

Charles shook his head.

Willis rose, and began to pace, with curiously short strides for a man of his height, up and down in front of the hearth.

"Now then," he said, "for what happened immediately after Lord Pursell had heard the cry for help through the telephone. I gather that the three of you rushed out of the room. . . ."

"Just a moment, Inspector," cut in Sandys's voice.

" I want to make sure you've got this right. Lord Pursell and Mr. Fox-Browne were alone in the study when the telephone bell rang that last time. I had, a couple of seconds before, left the room in order to go upstairs and see how the bridge party was getting on. I was just at the foot of the stairs when I heard the telephone. I ran back and opened the door just, I imagine, as Lord Pursell was hearing the cry for help. From the look on his face I knew that something had happened. He dropped the receiver and dashed out of the room, brushing me on one side just as I was entering it. Mr. Fox-Browne followed him. Lord Pursell went up the stairs first, with Mr. Fox-Browne and myself close at his heels. As we ran up the stairs he shouted back to us what he had heard over the telephone. When we got to the top of the stairs, Mr. Fox-Browne and I, running a little faster, managed to pass Lord Pursell. Mr. Fox-Browne actually reached the study door first. . . ."

Inspector Willis raised a hand in a deprecatory but final gesture. " Thank you, sir," he said. " Thank you. If you don't mind, *I* want to tell this story so that I can fix all the details firmly in my own head. I appreciate your point about the order in which your office downstairs was left and take it. . . . Now, with your permission, I will resume at the point where you and Mr Fox-Browne, following Lord Pursell, are running up the stairs. At the head of the stairs you and Mr. Fox-Browne passed Lord Pursell and gained the study door in the following order: Mr. Fox-Browne, yourself, Lord Pursell. Mr. Fox-Browne tried the door to find it locked. He called out to any one who might be inside, but received no answer and heard no sound Appreciating the situation, he then ran to the window of the palm court, climbed up to it, opened it and climbed outside. From there, shuffling along the string course—and how you did that, Mr. Fox-Browne, I don't know; it isn't a

thing I should like to try myself—he reached the study window; found that it was fastened upon the inside; broke a pane of glass with his hand, cutting the hand slightly; opened the window and jumped down into the room. He couldn't see Mrs. Lester-Greene from where he stood just within the window, but upon advancing into the room and looking to the left he saw the body, as it is now, laid out upon the couch. He went over to it and satisfied himself, after a very brief examination, that she was dead. Very wisely he glanced at his watch; noted the time as six minutes past ten, and immediately ran to the door and opened it to find outside you, Mr. Sandys, you, my lord, and also Mrs. Destrier who, alarmed by the noise, had run along—from where we shall subsequently find out—to find out what was the matter. Mr. Fox-Browne then admitted Mr. Sandys and Lord Pursell and closed the door. The three of you then satisfied yourselves—although this was not very difficult—that Mrs. Lester-Greene was dead: Then Mr. Sandys rang up the police from this room, Lord Pursell went out to break the news to Lady Maud Vassar and the rest of the household, and Mr. Fox-Browne stayed here with Mr. Sandys. . . ." The Inspector, lifting his head, looked about him. There was a certain pride in his carriage and glance. "Is that correct, gentlemen? If you disagree, even in the smallest detail, will you kindly tell me? Let me take you one at a time. Mr. Fox-Browne?"

Charles nodded. "Correct."

"Mr. Sandys?"

Sandys, his chin between his right forefinger and thumb and his right elbow cupped in the palm of his left hand, pondered for a moment before answering. "Yes," he said, "you've got it right."

"Lord Pursell?"

Pursell nodded vigorously. There were beads of sweat

upon his forehead. The monocle slipped from his eye but he did not notice its fall. " Absolutely O.K.," he said. " Marvellous to me how you can remember it."

The thin, mobile mouth of Inspector Willis—the only expressive feature of his face—twitched with his repression of a smile. He said: " Now, gentlemen, there are one or two further questions which have occurred to me —as I knew they would occur to me—while I was, as it were, epitomising your stories. I'm afraid I shall have to trouble you to answer them. . . . May I suggest that we sit down." He walked over to the desk and stood pre-emptively by the tall chair which had been Enid Lester-Greene's.

Charles, strolling away from the fire, sat down upon the oaken settle to the right of the doorway. Sandys took the big leather chair before the fire and Pursell the fellow chair to the one at the table. Willis sat himself. He said:

" Mr. Fox-Browne, I'll take you first. . . . When you came in through the window and became aware almost immediately of the presence of . . . of . . . of the body, you went over to it, didn't you?"

" Yes," said Charles.

" Did you, Mr. Fox-Browne, touch the body?"

" Yes."

" In what manner?"

" I put my hand on the left hand and lifted the left hand and observed the condition of the fingers and the coldness of the flesh. I then lifted the head and looked at the eyes. I then put my hand into the corsage of the dress to feel for a heart beat."

Willis nodded. " How long did these actions take you?"

For perhaps half a second, Charles considered. " Not less than thirty seconds; not more than forty-five."

" Let's make it, then, Mr. Fox-Browne, for the sake

of argument, forty-five seconds. The time, when you looked at your watch just before going to the door to admit the two other gentlemen, was six minutes past ten. Now, adding to the forty-five seconds taken in examination of the body another, shall we say, fifteen seconds to enter the room and discover the body, we have one minute, thus placing the time of your actual entry into the room at five minutes past ten. Now then, Mr. Fox-Browne, how long do you suppose it took you to leave the study door on the palm court side, come to the palm court window, open it, climb out and shuffle along the string-course to this window, break your pane, insert your hand and open the window for your entry?"

Again Charles spent something less than a second in rapid calculation. "Not less than three minutes forty-five; not more than four minutes."

"Thank you, Mr. Fox-Browne. Again, let's take your longest figure and round it off. Let us say that at the very maximum you must have taken four minutes from the palm court side of this door to the inside of this room. We then have your time of *leaving* the study door on the outside fixed at approximately one minute past ten, which tallies with your opening the study door at six minutes past ten."

Charles shrugged his shoulders. "That'll do."

"Now, how long do you suppose, Mr. Fox-Browne, that it would take you three gentlemen to run up the stairs from the office . . . You see what I'm aiming at? I'm trying to fix, as near definitely as I can, the time of the last 'phone call from the poor lady."

"Forty-five seconds."

"And you, Mr. Sandys?"

Sandys shook his head "I'd put it at more. A minute and a quarter or something like that."

"And you, my lord?"

Pursell, who had retrieved his monocle, was polishing

it upon a silk handkerchief from his breast pocket. He said: "Eh? What's that. . . . Oh! Sorry. . . . You're asking how long I think it would take a chap to run from the office up to the door in the palm court here?"

"Not how long it would take a *chap,* my lord, but how long it did take you and these other two gentlemen this evening."

"God knows!" said Purcell, and then with a wan smile: "And I don't suppose he'll split."

"You heard these other two gentlemen?" The Inspector's tone was now sharp edged. "Mr. Fox-Browne put the time at three-quarters of a minute and Mr. Sandys at a minute and a quarter. . . ."

"Well, what the hell"—Pursell was plaintive—"is the good of my making a calculation when these two giant brains have already been on the job? Call it a minute and I suppose I shouldn't argue with you."

The small shining eyes of Willis for an appreciable time fixed their gaze upon Pursell. The eighth baron shifted uneasily, but met the glance squarely enough.

The Inspector grunted. He half turned in his chair and once more faced Charles. He reached out a square, blunt-fingered hand and picked his note-book from the table, opened it and with the fountain pen made two or three notes. He set pen and note-book down again and said:

"Now, Mr. Fox-Browne, my second additional question. When you were at the door outside—when you got there and discovered it was locked, that is, did you call out?"

"Yes. I shouted 'What's the matter?'"

"Did you get any reply?"

"None."

"Did you hear any sound at all?"

"None."

"You heard no sound of any kind from this room from the time you left the office downstairs until the time when you burst through this window?"

"None."

"Did you hear any sound during that time which you considered to come from any other part of the house?"

"Consciously none. May have heard sound, but certainly no unusual sound."

Willis shifted his gaze. "Mr. Sandys," he said. "Same two questions."

"I stood at the door," said Sandys, "as I've told you two or three times already, hammering and shouting, but I heard nothing from this room at all until my ear caught a tinkling and that must have been Fox-Browne breaking the window. On the way up from the office I certainly heard nothing unusual."

"Thank you." Once more the eyes of the Law were fixed upon the eighth Baron Pursell of Mitcham.

"And you, my lord?"

"Ditto," said Pursell.

"Ssh." Sandys held up his hand. Through the broken window there came, from the drive-way below, the sudden sound of a powerful, smoothly running engine. Willis had heard it too. He rose and crossed to the window and looked out into the blackness; a blackness which now was seared by two white, fan-shaped beams of light. He turned back from the window. He said:

"That'll be the doctor. Maybe he's got the Chief Constable with him. Mr. Sandys, I'll ask you to go downstairs and see that they are brought straight up here."

2

Inspector Willis opened the door of the study. He

opened it quietly, but nevertheless there was, from a huddled group in the far corner near where the bridge table had been, a sudden startled movement. White faces turned to stare as Pursell and Charles were ushered out into the palm court.

"If you gentlemen," Willis said, "will be so kind as to wait here. . . ."

The swing doors to the palm court from the lobby were opened and there came through them Sandys, who stood aside to hold open the left-hand leaf. There entered two men, the first a short, square, thick-set and long-striding man; the second a tall, spare, erect person in evening clothes of singular elegance.

Once more the white faces were turned.

Charles and Pursell stood where they were. The Inspector, without another word to them, went forward.

"Evening, Willis." The short man's voice was a deep, harsh bark.

"Good-evening, sir," said the Inspector, but his eyes went to the taller figure. He stood at what seemed, because of the prosaicness of his clothes, a parody of attention. He said: "I am very glad you could come, sir." His voice was very low. "This . . . well, it's a queer business. . . . *I've* never met anything like it!"

"Where's the room?" The short man's voice drowned his companion's. The square black case in his right hand swung impatiently to and fro.

Charles took half a step forward. "Still barking, Riley?"

The doctor swung round. He stared; a stare which any one who did not know him might have taken for ferocious. He said, swinging the black bag to his left hand and holding out his right:

"Good God! It's Fox-Browne. . . . What *you* doing here? What you been up to? What's every one

been up to? What's the racket? Where's this room?" He took Charles's hand in a gorilla's grip and pumped it up and down. "Haven't seen you since '17 except for the only dinner you ever came to. How's things?"

"Excuse me, doctor." Inspector Willis's voice was suavely insistent. "One moment please. The room is here. Sir Roger would be glad if you would come straight in." Gently he insinuated himself between Riley and Charles. He urged Riley before him as a nervous but efficient sheep-dog might an animal of some other more dangerous species.

A little procession entered the room. The tall man, whom Willis had referred to as Sir Roger first; the short, violent-moving, aggressive Riley next; and last, the erect scrawniness of Inspector Willis. The door closed behind them only to open again immediately. Willis stood in the doorway. He raised his voice. "Holt!" he called.

From the shadows at the south-eastern corner of the court came a burly figure in clothes more aggressively plain than his Inspector's. His thick-soled boots rang upon the flags as he walked.

"Holt," said Willis's voice, low once more. "Don't let any of these people leave this court without orders from me. Got the statements?"

Holt nodded.

"Carey getting on with the staff?"

Holt nodded again.

"Right," said Willis and vanished. The study door closed behind him with a soft click.

Charles looked at Pursell, who stood plucking his lower lip and nervously taking out and reinserting his monocle.

"Come on," said Charles. "Got to talk to 'em some time." He took Pursell's right elbow in his left

hand and with him walked diagonally across to the huddled group in the corner.

Sandys was already there. He stood a little aloof from the others, who sat behind a table in an irregular semi-circle which had Maud Vassar as its centre. Upon her right were Gladys Lester-Greene and then Claude Lester. Upon her left, sitting farther apart from her than was Gladys upon the other side, was Lesley Destrier. Charles released Pursell's arm and Pursell, taking the first convenient chair, sank into that next Lesley. Charles, like Sandys, remained standing.

There was, now that the footsteps had stopped, silence which lasted for minutes which seemed each an hour. Then Sandys broke it. He turned suddenly upon his heel and walked past the fern bank to where in its shadow there stood the burly form of the man Willis had addressed as Holt. The murmur of their voices came across to the group and once more white faces—Charles saw them lift all together like the faces of sheep—were turned towards the new sound.

Charles came three steps nearer and stood close to the table. He looked straight at Lesley Destrier. He saw that her pallor had not lessened. He looked at Maud Vassar and saw that she sat, in characteristic attitude, with hands folded in lap and heavy white lids veiling her eyes. But he saw also that, uncharacteristically, her whole lean old frame was taut and that the hands which at first sight appeared merely to rest one upon the other were in fact each gripping the other until the knuckles stood out whiter than their surrounding whiteness. He looked at Gladys Lester-Greene to see not a woman but a huddled, shapeless thing slumped in her chair with her arms appearing to try and wrap themselves round her and her head sunk forward, its chin dug into her breast. He could not see her face as he stood, but only the top of a black, untidy head. She had a shawl thrown over

her shapelessness and every now and then—her only movement—she shuddered so that the shawl was gradually slipping from one sallow-skinned thin shoulder. He looked at Claude Lester and saw that this man was staring not at what was before his eyes but at some inner picture behind them: he was very pale, the skin of his usually dark face being of a yellowish grey; his eyes were dilated; the corners of his mouth twitched, and his hands were uneasy.

Once more quick footsteps rang out upon the flags, and Sandys was back again. He walked past the table and round to the other corner of the fern bank He stooped and pressed the bell which was hidden in the side of the bank. He came back to the group and stood beside Charles. He said to Charles:

"I've been talking to the bobby there. They don't want us to leave here just at present, but he's quite willing that we should ring and get Seton or some one to get drinks. Personally, I think every one would be the better for something."

Charles nodded.

"What about a chair?" said Sandys. His voice was a little higher pitched than usual but otherwise showed commendable attempt at the very necessary quality of ordinariness. He pulled up two chairs and slid one in Charles's direction.

3

Maud Vassar opened her eyes for the first time in a quarter hour which seemed like a night. Her wide eyes looked at each member of the circle round the small table, upon which there now stood two trays with syphons and decanters. She did not immediately speak, but yet, strangely, each member of the party in turn became aware, without having previously looked at her,

that she was about to speak. She said, when all eyes were upon her:

"You know, I think we're making a mistake. We're talking, when we do talk, like English gentlepeople faced with disaster. In other words, we're being ostriches in conversation and behaviour. We're trying to look normal. We're trying to speak normally. But we are in what even Mr. Fox-Browne will admit, I'm sure, as most abnormal circumstances. Therefore, it's abnormal to try to behave normally. The normal behaviour would be abnormal . . . Dear me! I must sound as if I were trying to be clever. I'm not really."

Beside her, the crouched form of Gladys Lester-Greene shuddered again and one of the sounds which were half sigh half sob came from her. Maud Vassar put out a long white hand which rested upon the shaking shoulder. Its thin old fingers closed reassuringly over the young soft flesh. She said, not looking at the girl:

"I hope you all see what I mean. It seems to me that if we want to save our reason, we must admit abnormality; even air it. I, of course, already have done so because I spend my life in admitting what to others is abnormal. But frankly, I'm afraid for some of you who are here." Her eyes were looking directly at Charles. "You're faced with, besides tragedy, something which you don't understand but which, like the fools that you are, you hope will soon be explained . . . and explained, forsooth, by a lot of clod-hopping country policemen barely intelligent enough to write their own names." Her thin, youthful voice dropped its words into the silence with a vibrant and metallic finality. She ceased speaking, but still her strange eyes kept the eyes of all the others upon her. The silence was electric with her determination that she should be answered.

Oddly, it was Charles who spoke first, and, oddly, he

said: "With most of what you say, Lady Maud, I agree." He turned his head to look at Sandys next him, but it was not Sandys who spoke next.

There was a sudden and shocking screeching as the legs of one of the chairs were thrust back over the flags, then a soft crash as it fell.

Claude Lester had jumped to his feet. His face, its yellowish tan shocking in the subdued light, was working, and there was a trace of white foam at the corners of his thin-lipped mouth. His voice—a harsh semi-shout —rent the still, over-warm air.

"And I *don't* agree! By God, I don't agree! We've been talking here and that policeman at the back there's been talking to us." Astonishingly, his long lean right arm shot out a trembling index finger which pointed full at Charles. "There was a telephone call to the office and you, with the others, came rushing upstairs! The others behaved like ordinary human beings and tried to get in at the door. But *you* didn't! You knew that they would stay at the door and so you went out at that window there . . ." The pointing arm swung round for a quick half-second to the left-hand of the windows, then swung back to Charles. "Listen, you others! Fox-Browne goes out through that window, climbs along the ledge and breaks in at the study window. Enid had that room made so soundproof that you could hear practically nothing from outside. Pursell and Sandys don't hear him come in, and when he unlocks the door and lets them in Enid's dead and suffocated. . . . I'm normal all right, but if you want to talk about abnormalities, there's your abnormality, God blast him!" His arm dropped to his side. He stood, swaying a little upon his feet and staring still at Charles.

Charles, his head turned to meet the stare, sat motionless.

Claude Lester dropped his gaze. His eyes shifted.

He put out a hand behind him which groped, uncertain and unsteady, for the overturned chair.

There was no sound now in the palm court. The footsteps of the policeman, who at the beginning of this tirade had come out from his corner and now stood not more than ten feet from the edge of the circle, had passed unheard.

Sandys got quickly and quietly to his feet. He passed behind the swaying figure of Claude Lester and picked up the chair. He put his hand on Lester's shoulder. "Sit down!" he said, and the man sat.

Maud Vassar opened her eyes. She said:

"I'm not sure that I was right about the desirability of behaving abnormally. . . ."

4

"I wish," said Lesley Destrier in her deep voice, "that they'd let us go. . . ."

The circle sat as it had. Perhaps twenty minutes had passed since Claude Lester's outburst; a twenty minutes spent largely in staring silence; a twenty minutes in which no one of the party had looked directly at his neighbour. No one, that is, save Charles, who had divided unobtrusive watchings of the downbent head and white shoulders of Lesley Destrier with open and unreadable stares at Lester. All heads except Charles's turned towards her. This was the first time she had spoken since the beginning—how long was it ago?—of the appalling wait.

"I think," began Sandys, but did not finish. For on his second word there came the sound of voices from the study door; and then quick footsteps coming across the flags—Inspector Willis with the short stride so ill-fitted to his height. He halted a few paces from the group. He cleared his throat. It was plain that the

man was embarrassed. He said, in a voice unlike his own:

"Is Mr. Fox-Browne here? . . . Oh, there you are, sir! . . . The Chief Constable's compliments and he would be very glad if you would step into the study."

Willis led the way across the flagged court to the study door. For a moment the eyes of all at the table—even Gladys raised her head—followed the two backs and then, as the door closed behind Charles, turned once more to their front and apprehensive apathy.

Inside the study Charles found himself faced by the tall and elegant Sir Roger Amblethorpe. From where he had characteristically been sitting at the foot of the couch, Riley came barging forward.

"Here you are!" he said, his voice like the angry premonitory barkings of a large dog. He turned to the Chief Constable. "This is Fox-Browne." He turned to Charles. "This is Amblethorpe, Chief Constable. S'Roger."

Charles waited. His grey eyes looked out of a mask-like face and rested their glance upon the faded blue ones of the tall man in dress clothes. For a moment the two stood staring, wordless, at each other. And then Amblethorpe held out his hand.

But an air of constraint remained. The room was very quiet. Charles smiled at himself for thinking how ominously quiet it was. Through the broken pane the wind now blew stronger, and the alabaster bowl hanging by its silver chains from the ceiling swung in the draught. And still the black-clad, straightly ordered, bulky body lay upon the day-couch.

Riley, like a stocky, heavily-built Airedale, stood between and at the side of Amblethorpe and Charles. Behind this group prowled Inspector Willis. Charles's eye, taking stock of the room, saw many matters which, half an hour ago when he had left the room, had not

been there. Upon the writing table was a flat case of brown leather, open; a case which he now remembered seeing Willis set down in the corner of the room as he entered. Beside the case were two tall, round tins, and between them an insufflator. Everywhere were traces of this insufflator's work; small black patches upon light-coloured things, small white patches upon dark-coloured things.

The silence threatened to become discomfortable. But before it did more than threaten, it was broken by Riley. Riley said:

"For God's sake! We've got the man in here. Let's tell him something. Can't stand about like a lot of bloody dummies. Sorry, sorry! Not my job, I know. I'm the bloody sawbones." He looked at Amblethorpe with angry dark eyes. "I've told you what I think, perhaps I'd better push off."

The Chief Constable started into life. "My dear fellah! My dear fellah! Please, please! I wouldn't dream of your going." He looked at Charles, a faint and nervous smile distorting the well-cut mouth under the grey moustache. "The fact is, Mr. Fox-Browne, Dr. Riley here, who we think a lot of in this part of the world, as indeed any one who knew him would be bound to . . ."

"For God's sake!" said Riley.

"Dr. Riley," the Chief Constable's voice went smoothly on, "has told us, Mr. Fox-Browne, how well he knows you and what a high opinion he has of you . . . your . . . your . . ."

Again Riley exploded. "What I told him, Fox-Browne, was that you weren't a bloody fool. I also mentioned the Chateau Leroy business."

"Oh, that!" said Charles.

"Yes. Yes." The Chief Constable once more took over the conversation. "Well, Mr. Fox-Browne, this

is an extraordinary affair. And I am using the word 'extraordinary' in its very fullest sense. If I could think "—he laughed a little—" of a more extraordinary word I would use it. I understand from Inspector Willis that you, Mr. Fox-Browne, have come down here to Friar's Pardon to act in the capacity of Land Steward or Agent to the estate. I also understand from Dr. Riley here that during a very varied career in the army you were once attached to the Intelligence and were for a time Chief Intelligence Officer to Brigadier-General Mallison's Brigade on the Somme. I know Mallison, by the way, very well. He and I were subalterns together in India more years ago than I care to remember. Dr. Riley tells me that during part of your service with the Intelligence you performed one or two notable . . . er . . . services; services, I mean, which were very much out of the ordinary line of military intelligence. For one of them I believe you received . . ."

Riley, who had been jigging up and down from heel to toe, could stand the rigmarole no longer. He said: "For God's sake, Amblethorpe!" in tones of such passionate and wrathful anguish that for a moment the Chief Constable seemed to pale.

Charles cut in. "You're right," he said. "But tell me what it's got to do with this." His hand made a small decisive gesture which took in the whole of the room.

"Quite! Quite!" The Chief Constable seemed, at last, to be forcing himself to a point distasteful to him. He squared his elegant shoulders and spoke in a louder, determinedly determined voice. He said:

"To put the matter in a nutshell, Mr. Fox-Browne, Dr. Riley is prepared to swear that this poor lady "—the grey head made a gesture half decisive, half shrinking, to indicate the couch behind him—" died a death which upon the face of it is impossible."

Riley almost danced in fury. " I say that that woman was drowned—d-r-o-w-n-e-d—*drowned*! When we have the autopsy I'll prove it! But if there's anybody here that thinks I don't know a case of death by drowning when I see it, if he'll only tell me, I'll punch his blasted face for him with pleasure. You can take it from me, *that woman was drowned! . . .*"

" So you see, Mr. Fox-Browne," cut in the Chief Constable smoothly, managing at once to convey the impression of having deferred to Riley's words and at the same time ignored him, " that this is no ordinary vulgar murder case. I am faced with an apparent impossibility: a set of circumstances which seem, at least at first glance, to render the ordinary routine of police work . . . er . . . er . . . unsuited to proper investigation . . In such circumstances, it naturally becomes my duty as Chief Constable of the County . . ."

An ill-concealed groan from Riley checked him, but only momentarily.

". . . It naturally becomes my duty, I say, as Chief Constable of the County, to take any other measures, however unusual, to assist me in coming to a definite conclusion in the er . . . er . . . affair."

" Meaning," said Charles, wondering how much more of this he could stand, " that another cook might improve the broth." He added, using more words than was his inclination: "Anything I can do, of course . . ."

The Chief Constable, delicately drying the palms of his hands on a silk handkerchief, shifted his burden. " Riley!" he said. " Just now, before you persuaded us to send for Mr. Fox-Browne, you gave a very lucid if rather violent exposition of the extraordinary features of this case. Would you mind going over that again." He turned to Charles. " I should explain, Mr. Fox-Browne, that Dr. Riley, who has worked with us for a number of years now, is a very favoured consultant of

ours. If I may say so, he is no ordinary police surgeon. He is . . ."

"A man who's not quite," said Riley violently, "such a bloody fool as some . . . Now, then, Fox-Browne, providing you are telling Willis the truth, I know exactly what happened, from your point of view anyhow, to-night. . . ."

Charles cut him short. He said: "One minute!" He turned to the Chief Constable. "Should tell you, sir, that I've just been accused."

"Just been . . ." The Chief Constable arched his grey brows, politely and a little pathetically puzzled.

"Accused," said Charles, trying again. "Claude Lester, *her* brother, accused me. He pointed out that what happened was that I knocked in the window, strangled the lady, and then let in the others."

"Good God!" said the Chief Constable. But although, politely, his tone expressed astonishment that any one should accuse his new friend, Mr. Fox-Browne, in was plain that in his single-footing mind the germ of Claude Lester's suggestion had sown a seed. His eyes did not meet Charles's, and he took a shuffled half-step away . . . Charles could see his mind working. After all . . . after all, was there something in it? It would at least be a *human* explanation. . . .

Behind them Willis had ceased to prowl and was now standing, head thrust forward, alertly listening.

Riley, turning away from the group with a movement uncharacteristically slow but characteristically deliberate, walked with heavy step round the table and sank into the high-backed chair. He lowered his bullet head and covered his face with his hands, which were square and strong and clever. After a moment he looked up. His face was distorted with more than its usual ugliness. A sneer twisted his mouth and his eyes were black, fire-darting slits. He said:

"Let me now explain to the class. I've told you, children, that the woman was *drowned*; a word meaning 'met death by suffocation caused by the arresting of breath by watery or semi-fluid substances.' We have, as Willis minor has written out in his copy-book, more than enough evidence to show that from the time when Fox-Browne left the hot-house window out there to the time when he opened the door to the other two men was not more than four minutes at the outside. I think the class will see, if I repeat this lecture every day twice nightly at six-thirty and nine for a fortnight, that it would be an impossibility for Fox-Browne to have strangled the woman in the time, much less to have drowned her and removed all traces of what he drowned her with . . . I hope that my long-winded technical language is not too baffling for the pupils." He shot to his feet. "For God's sake," he said, "let's cut out this cackle and get on! This is *interesting*!"

The Chief Constable, a little pink about the cheeks, drew himself up. "I don't know, Riley, what you're talking about. Lester's suggestion was obviously either purely malicious or the outcome of hysteria. In any case, it's quite obvious, as you say, that Mr. Fox-Browne could not have perpetrated the . . . er . . . er . . . deed." His eyes went to the bed with its dark, still burden; then slid away shy and frightened. "And I must say, Riley," he added, dropping his own voice, "that it seems hardly seemly to *shout* in this room!"

"Oh, sorry! Sorry!" Riley waved him petulantly aside and spoke to Charles. "You were down in some office with the secretary and Lord Flookempoosh. Secretary leaves room and telephone rings. Secretary, hearing bell, comes back. But Flookempoosh has answered it and has heard this woman's voice from this room calling out for help. You all dash up the stairs, leaving the office place at about ten o'clock. You do

your cinema stuff—bloody fool!—and open the door to the secretary and Lord Flyblow at six minutes past ten. Inference: that the woman was drowned between the time Lordy dropped the telephone and you got out of the hot-house window, which was about two minutes. Inference, also, that in that time, the man who did kill her got away up the chimney, first having got rid of all traces of the fluid with which he did the dirty work. . . . In other words, the whole thing's *impossible!* But there "—he swung on his heel to face the couch—" *there* is the woman. And she's dead. And she was *drowned.* When you found her the time was five past ten. When I saw her the time was twelve-thirty—an interval of approximately two and a half hours. And I can't swear —and nor can any of your Home Office experts—anything more than that, when I saw her, she had been dead not less than an hour and not more than four hours . . . Nice little puzzle, isn't it?"

Charles came up to the table and stood upon the doormost side of it and leant upon it with the heels of his hands. He was looking down at Willis's brown leather case, the two tins and the insufflator. He said, without raising his head: " No violence marks, Riley?"

Riley shook his black bullet head. " None. At least, not down to the waist. Haven't stripped her right out yet. . . ."

" *Please!*" said the Chief Constable. . . .

" Will, though." Riley went to the couch with his thrusting, long-strided walk and bent over what lay on it, busying himself.

Willis looked at the Chief Constable. The Chief Constable nodded. Willis went to the gold screen and set it up so that the couch and Riley were now hidden from the room.

Charles nodded down towards the tins. " Good

prints?" he said. He looked up suddenly at Willis and smiled a friendly smile.

The Inspector, who had stiffened at the curt tone, melted. "Some pretty good ones, sir." He shook his head. "But if you ask me, they'll all be the . . . deceased's."

Charles looked now at the open drawers of the writing table. Again he jerked his head. "Anything there?"

The Chief Constable came forward. "As a matter of fact, Fox-Browne"—he was nervously genial—"there was. Acting in accordance with my decision, I'm going to let you see what we've seen." He stopped abruptly, looking sharply at Willis, who had drawn in his breath with a little hissing sound faintly apprehensive. "But," added Amblethorpe, staring at Charles, "I shall have to ask you to be discreet. I don't suppose it's necessary, really, but you will please give me your word that you will not—how shall I put it?—relay anything you are told by us."

Charles looked at him.

"Thanks. Thanks," said the Chief Constable hastily. "Now, then, Willis. . . ."

From underneath the large sheet of brown paper which covered the present contents of his open case, Willis gingerly drew an envelope, upon which were written two words in a tall, slapdash, distorted handwriting, and a red morocco-covered volume of quarto size. He held out the envelope to the Chief Constable, his fingers and thumb only touching the extreme corner. Charles, glancing down, saw that the envelope had been cut. Amblethorpe took the envelope gingerly by its far corner and more gingerly still pulled out a single sheet of notepaper, covered on both sides with the same writing as that of the address.

"This letter," he said, waving it "is addressed, as you can see, to Lord Pursell. It was in the left-hand

drawer of the desk, which was locked. I should say—I don't know whether you'll agree—that it was to be delivered by hand in the morning." He laid down the sheet, holding it flat by its two left-hand corners, upon the table.

Charles, shifting his position a little, bent to read it. He read:

"DEAR TREVOR,

"As I promised you, I have given the most careful consideration to our conversation this afternoon.

"Before we have another talk on the subject, I would like to advise you, as one not only of considerable worldly experience, but also as one who thinks of you as a friend, to think over your position very carefully.

"I know that what I am doing would, in many, seem evil. But I know that in attempting to guide your life into the way which I am sure is best and happiest for you, I am doing good, not only to my dear daughter, but also to you, my dear boy. I hope that, on consideration, you will realise that I know best. I hope that you will also realise that I mean every word I said this afternoon.

"I am sure that, whether you realise it or not yourself, you and Gladys would make an ideal couple. I am also equally sure that if you make the mistake of not soon putting the question for which my darling girl is anxiously waiting, I shall have to take the course which I outlined to you this afternoon and inform a certain person as to your whereabouts. I am sure I shall not have to do this, but I hope you will realise that my mentioning the possibility is not inspired by vindictiveness, but simply by the desire to bring about what I know is the best and happiest thing for Gladys and for you, too, my dear boy."

There, with a flourish of initials which could just be

distinguished as E. L. G., it ended at the foot of its second page.

Charles stood upright. He looked, not at the Chief Constable or at Inspector Willis, but across the room towards the screen. From behind the screen there came muffled rustlings and occasionally a hoarse mutter.

The eyes of Willis and Amblethorpe were fixed upon Charles. Both pairs had in them an anxious, watching expression; the sort of expression one may see in the eyes of an animal in distress trusting to a stranger to help him but by no means sure whether help will be forthcoming. Amblethorpe, handling the sheet of note-paper as if it were gelignite, pushed it back into its envelope. Willis took it from his fingers and tenderly placed it in the bottom of his case.

Charles pointed at the morocco book. "Diary?" he said.

"Yes, sir." Willis picked it up and gave it to him. "No prints on it, sir; so you can hold it."

Charles held it. It was a diary with two pages for every day of the year. He flipped over the leaves, to see that until the date of this very night the pages were full; full with the same handwriting as the letter, only very neatly and orderly formed.

"What we were interested in . . ." began Willis, and then shut his mouth. He saw that this friend of Dr. Riley's was paying no attention to him. Craning, he saw that this friend of Dr. Riley's was already doing what he, Willis, had been about to suggest. He was reading the entry for the past day, November 10th. His eye slid, as it were, over the tops of the close written sentences which covered the first page of the entry. These, which Willis had read with slow and painful incomprehension, were the thoughts of the great lady; thoughts fashioned, Charles decided, with an eye rather for future publication than because they had ever had

spontaneous birth. Upon the second page, however, came fact. After a small level break and under the word *Mems.;* there appeared, neatly numbered, the following entries:

" 1. Write Trevor re-affirming.
" 2. Speak Norman re Gautier's complaint. Make sure tell Gladys. (Afraid Norman is a naughty boy!)? Better keep girl.
" 3. See Lesley in the morning and re-affirm nothing doing, but offer her slightly increased allowance."

Charles shut the book with a snap. He handed it back to Willis. Willis looked at him, with eyes which strove unsuccessfully to conceal their eagerness. Willis said, having waited for remark which did not come:

" What do you think of it, sir?" His voice was as eager as his eyes.

Charles grunted. " Interesting! You'll speak to Pursell and Mrs. Destrier and the French girl?"

" Of course, sir." Willis did not strive to keep from his voice disappointment at these aridities.

Charles grunted. He began to walk slowly, and apparently aimlessly, about the room. His hands were in his jacket pockets and his head was carried at an indefinable angle which disguised from the watching Willis where the eyes might be sending glances. He walked to the window and opened it and looked out. He shut the window and turned and sauntered to the door. He turned the key in the lock several times, cocking his head a little as if listening. He wandered back as if he were going to the table again, but suddenly swerving, continued his way to the fire. He stood looking at the fire upon which, three-quarters of an hour ago, Willis had thrown fresh logs from the box beside

the fire casket. Stooping head and shoulders, he went into the great fireplace itself and took from the right-hand hearth-bench, where it usually stood, a big round silver bowl. He brought this out to the light.

"That's nothing, sir," said Willis quickly. "Only an ash-tray. You can see the cigarette stubs. Lady must've been a great smoker."

Charles did not seem to hear. He came still farther out into the room until the full light fell upon the bowl and its contents. He twisted the bowl this way and that, looking at the crushed cigarette stubs and dead matches which it contained. He brought it over to the table and set it down and counted the stubs. There were eleven, with thirteen matches.

Willis came and stood at his left shoulder and Amblethorpe at his right. Willis opened his mouth as if to speak and shut it again. Amblethorpe, however, did speak. Amblethorpe for the last few minutes had been wandering uneasily about the room, his hands in his pockets, his stooping shoulders hunched up until they nearly touched his ears—an attitude which, in any other circumstances, would have comically destroyed the elegance of his coat. Amblethorpe said, his voice higher than when Charles had last heard it and with an edge of some new emotion to it:

"What are you doing? What are you doing? . . . I say, have you noticed this room's got a . . . a . . . an odd sort of *feel* to it?"

"Eh?" said Charles absently, his finger still among the contents of the big bowl.

The Chief Constable looked pained. "Nothing," he said, "nothing! I suppose I'm getting an old man and late hours try me more than they should. All I said was that I thought this room had a . . . an . . . you may think it ridiculous of me, but I feel it most de-

finitely . . . a peculiar—what's the word they use?—a peculiar aura."

"Oh," said Charles. "Maybe." He pointed to the bowl and looked at Willis. "Finger-prints?" he said.

Willis shook his head. He took trouble to conceal a smile; the friendly but pitying smile of the professional for the amateur. "Hardly, sir. If there had been I should've asked you not to touch it."

"Mean," said Charles, "have you tried it?"

Willis looked at him. "We have, sir. I've powdered every inch of it. Funny thing, but there isn't a single print on it."

"Very funny," said Charles. "Something else funny, too."

"Eh?" said Amblethorpe, coming nearer. "Eh? Eh? What's that you say?"

"Ash," said Charles, picking up the bowl and walking back toward the fire.

The Chief Constable followed him, peering down at the thing. "Ash? Can't see any. Only stubs."

"Exactly," said Charles, stooping and entering the archway of the fireplace. He put the bowl back upon the seat where he had found it. As he came out into the room again, the screen round the couch was violently thrust aside. Riley came bullocking towards the centre of the room, pulling down his sleeves. He looked at Charles. "Nary mark," he said. "Body's like a fat cow's. Well-kept one, too."

"Mark?" said Amblethorpe, almost querulous. "What mark?"

Riley glared at him. "No marks. Meaning no signs of violence. Nothing." Again he looked at Charles. "Well, Foxy?"

"Not very." Charles, hands back in his jacket pockets, again left the group. He resumed his saunter This time, his wandering took him to the book-shelf

which ran down from the foot of the day-couch to the corner by the door. He walked along this book-shelf, first to the head of the couch and then down the whole length of it and then back once more to the centre. He stood opposite the big tapestry and stared first at one of the bronze urns upon the shelf and then at the other.

Willis, as if his feet were being drawn by an invisible wire, came to him. "We've tried those for finger-prints too, sir," said Willis. His words came out reluctantly, as if he had not wished to speak them. "And on this one"—he pointed to the left of the two urns—"we found two beautiful prints—one thumb and I should say the first and third fingers. Look like a woman's. It's too early to tell yet till we get the photos, of course. But it's my opinion, sir, and I'm not without experience, that they're different prints from the lot we found, which, judging by the size and shape of them, must have belonged to . . . to that poor . . . to the deceased. You can't see them from here, sir." He moved to his left with such an air of eagerness that Charles, willy-nilly, followed him, to see upon the other side of the urn's narrow neck, three white blobs where the powder from the insufflator had stuck to the greasy markings of a thumb and two fingers.

"There, sir!" said Willis, triumphant. Only to add a second later: "I expect we shall find they're the housemaid's."

There came, to relieve Charles of the necessity for speech, a loud tapping at the door. The Chief Constable, who had been sitting, shoulders still hunched and head sunk between them, on the bench beside the door, sprang up and turned the handle. Over the threshold came a square, cadaverous man looking like a retired small-town-grocer. He carried in his left hand the strapped-together legs of a tall tripod, under his left arm a long

cylindrical case, and in his right hand a heavy, black, mackintosh-covered camera.

"Willis!" said the Chief Constable unnecessarily, his tone showing relief at having something new to direct. "Here's Carter."

Charles found himself alone Round the newcomer clustered Willis and Amblethorpe, while Riley, silent and strangely meek, sat upon the edge of the table and smoked a long thin cigarette of atrocious odour. Charles, taking care to avoid the white blobs of the finger-prints, lifted the lid of the left-hand urn and, reaching up, thrust his hand down into the urn. At the end of the hand was a handkerchief. He found the attitude awkward, removed the hand and lifted the urn by its base and put it on the floor. He knelt and plunged his right hand, the handkerchief still in its fingers, into the urn. In a moment he straightened. He glanced at the unsullied handkerchief and put it back in his pocket. He lifted the urn and put it back in its place. He turned to its fellow and found the eyes of Willis fixed upon him reproachfully. He said:

"All right! Haven't touched the finger-prints." He turned to the other urn. With this, he repeated the process without variation. When the second urn was back on its shelf and the handkerchief, now smeared with dust, back in his pocket, he walked slowly to the table and Riley.

Riley looked at him. "What the hell," he said, "you think you're doing, I don't know!"

Charles lifted his shoulders. "Perhaps I don't myself."

Riley put back his bullet head and laughed; a raucous, tearing sound which drew a reproving hiss from Amblethorpe in the background. "Sorry! Sorry!" Riley flung the words over his shoulder as a dog will fling a rat. He turned back to Charles.

"Now, then, Foxy, what you got to say? Nothing, I suppose. Always did have constipation of the vocal cords. . . . Can you tell me whether it's possible to get a drink in this mausoleum?"

Charles jerked his head in the direction of Willis and Amblethorpe and the camera man, who now had his tripod up and was setting the camera. "Get me a pass out and I'll fix it."

Riley looked at him. "Getting quite chatty! . . . Oy, Willis!"

Willis came up to them. "Yes, sir."

"I, Willis," said Riley, with a smile which showed large white teeth, "want a drink. So does Mr. Fox-Browne. So do you, I expect, but you'll say no. Can we get out and get one if we're good little boys? Any objection from you or S'Roger?"

Willis shook his head. "None, doctor . . . There's one thing, though. I'd be glad if you and Mr. Fox-Browne would come back before Mr. Fox-Browne goes to bed."

They were back in twenty minutes; twenty minutes within which they had talked of anything and everything save Friar's Pardon and its problem . . . They found, to Riley's vociferous disgust, that they might as well have stayed where they were. For once, Amblethorpe was adamant. He was going home.

CHAPTER XI

SET TO PARTNERS

I

It was four-thirty in the morning when the cars which had brought Riley, Amblethorpe and Willis left Friar's Pardon.

At five o'clock Friar's Pardon slept; or tried to sleep

—that is, as regards those persons who had been resident until that night. There were, however, four men in Friar's Pardon who did not try to sleep because they knew that on no account must they sleep, these were the four, Holt at their head, who had been brought by Willis. They were posted, two upon the first floor with the palm court as their headquarters, and two upon the ground floor with the hall as their headquarters. At intervals they patrolled, as softly as they might. And without exception—for they were all—save one, and he an Irishman, local—they longed for sunrise. They did not like Friar's Pardon. They had never liked Friar's Pardon by hearsay and they liked it less by knowledge.

"Save us!" said Holt, sergeanthood cast aside for the night in favour of human companionship. "'Tisn't p'lice they want here, it's a batch of parsons." But they did, being men in the main stolidly conscientious, carry out the orders which had been given to them, and throughout the four hours of darkness, which seemed like twenty-four, they saw not, nor heard nor felt—save in instances immediately proved to be existent only in their imagination—anything untoward. . . .

And the rest of Friar's Pardon slept or tried to sleep. . . . But the night, round Friar's Pardon, was stung with many lights from many windows which, as a rule, were dark squares of glass.

2

The sun rose—a pale yellow globe of November. It mounted higher and higher. The sundial in the rose-garden on the third of the terraces sent its shadow to the mark of eight. A pale attenuated shaft of watery golden light came through the window of the room in which Charles slept. It did not awake him, but there came soon a tap upon the door which did.

He opened an eye and was momentarily puzzled—until memory of the past night flooded back to him—by the room. He called out and the door opened and there entered to him, talking before ever she was fully into the room, the pert singer of *Mironton-Mirontaine.* She was clad in the same frock as yesterday or its twin, but the apron was different. It was an apron, this morning, which covered a great deal more of its wearer's trim, provocative little body than had the useless lace of yesterday afternoon. It was an apron which managed, by some grace of its wearer's, to combine pleasantly an air of efficiency with demure feminine appeal.

". . . *Vraiment! Vraiment!*" said the rich little voice. " *Mais . . . Ah! Mon Dieu! . . . Qu'est-ce que ci? . . . Ou est Madame? . . . Ooh, la-la!* It ees the new Monsieur! Monsieur, I apologise a t'ousand time, but I think that this morning is like other morning and that Madame Destrier, it is she to whom I bring this tray with *thé* . . . An' now I find it ees you, Monsieur. . . . Monsieur. . . ."

Charles sat up in bed, putting up to ruffled hair an automatically smoothing hand. The disturber of his sleep now stood close at his bedside. She made much play with her large eyes. She set down upon the table by the head of the bed a tray with tea things She said:

" Monsieur is in the room of Madame Destrier; so it will be that Madame is in the room of Monsieur. Hien? So that Madame will have the *thé* of Monsieur taken by one of the *femmes-des-chambres* and the *thé* of Madame brought by Thérèse, that can be had by Monsieur . . . Monsieur . . ?"

" Fox-Browne," said Charles. He let his grey eyes answer for a moment the play of the large ones, black as sloes, which glittered and rolled. " You're merry," he said. " No heart, Therese?"

"No 'eart, M'sieu!" She fell back a pace and stared. "No 'eart! *Moi, Thérèse Gautier! No* 'eart!" She put back her head and laughed—a silver rippling. Her pretty, plump throat trembled to the sound. "M'sieu, it is my trouble—al-ways, *tout-le-temps, toujours*—before that I 'ave too much! *Non,* m'sieu!" The laughter which had been trilling through her words ceased suddenly. Her eyes grew wide and shed their playfulness. She said, in a voice low and solemn and as unlike as another person's to that which she had been using:

"It is that Monsieur thinks that Thérèse should not laugh, should not talk perhaps, when las' night, Madame Greene she is die? . . ." She came a half pace nearer to the bed so that now her legs were pressed against its edge. "Listen then, Monsieur, and I will tell you how it is that I laugh and talk to-day this morning. It is not because I 'ave not like Madame Greene—though that it is true in a little way. It is because, M'sieu, I breathe for the firs' time in this 'ouse which 'as been so . . . so . . . *terrible! Parceque, dans ce maison* . . . Pardon, m'sieu! . . it is because ever since I came to this 'ouse, I 'ave been affright Oh! most shockingly affright! . . ." The voice dropped to a whisper, the trim little body bent. "Monsieur, there 'ave been t'ings 'appen in this 'ouse . . . but M'sieu will 'ave 'eard by yet. And 'e will either—'ow do you say?—believe these things or not believe; it is no matter to 'im what Thérèse say . . . But Thérèse will tell this to M'sieu: she 'as not been 'appy 'ere. *Non, non!* But now, although it is *terrible* that the *pauvre* Madame Greene should be die, Thérèse is 'appy. There . . . there . . . was . . . was . . . somesing in this 'ouse which has now gone . . . *Mais oui, M'sieu!* . . . And zat is 'ow Thérèse is 'appy. She cannot 'elp it. Monsieur will not be angry with Thérèse! Non? . . . And, and . . ."

—the whisper grew suddenly intense—" M'sieu will not . . . will not say to any one that Thérèse is 'appy? Thérèse would not . . . 'ow do you say? . . . would not 'ave shown 'appy, but M'sieu 'e look so . . . so *sympatique* as well as *charmante* . . . *eh bien,* Thérèse could not 'elp it! . . . M'sieu will not say?"

Charles looked at her. " Rest easy."

" Monsieur is . . . is . . . *eh bien,* M'sieu is so good. Particularly one would ask M'sieu that he does not say . . . that he does not speak of the mattaire to Monsieur Sandys." The last word was vibrant with a new note.

Charles shook his head. " Rest easy," he said again.

" A t'ousand thank, Monsieur . . . It is that one does not like that Monsieur Sandys. He is not *sympatique* like Monsieur." The large eyes made it plain that this Monsieur was so sympatique that Thérèse would be wax in his hands. " And as Monsieur so unfortunately saw but the evening of yesterday, Monsieur Sandys he think that Thérèse should like 'im!" The eyes dropped their glance. " But Thérèse does *not* like 'im. No, 'e is not like Monsieur. 'E is . . ."

" Easy there!" said Charles, and reaching out an arm, began to pour tea.

" *Certainement, M'sieu*! . . . *Au 'voir, M'sieu.*" The door clicked behind her, seeming to leave in the room the ghosts of a pair of eyes which promised and pleaded.

" Well, well!" said Charles, who was not usually given to speech with himself.

3

At breakfast—though he was not down until after ten o'clock—Charles found—awkwardly, only Claude Lester. He looked at Claude Lester, this morning a

sallow wreck with black pouches beneath bloodshot eyes and a hand which trembled so much that the furtive assistance of its fellow was needed to get it to his mouth. He said to Claude Lester, in a tone which skilfully blent commiseration and decorum with a willingness to let dogs sleep undisturbed:

"Sorry I'm late. Any news from . . ." But he was not allowed to finish his sentence.

Claude Lester's cup fell back into its saucer with a protesting clatter. The man shot to his feet as if plucked by the unseen hand of an angry god. He stared across the table at Charles and his mouth worked and the words came out of it distorted. He said, nearly shouting:

"Damn you! What d'you mean by coming down here and behaving as if nothing had happened? Blast you, you swine! You think because you've got some interfering busybody of a friend in the police you can get away with it . . . But you can't! . . . You can't, I say. Last night Gladys and the Vassar woman tried to persuade me to come and apologise to you. By God, when I think how nearly I came to doing it I'm ashamed of myself. I went along to your room some time this morning after we'd all gone to bed and I was going to apologise to you! Think o' that!" A sudden harsh scream of something meant to be laughter got mixed up with his words. "Ye Gods! Think o' that! I suppose I was weak because I was tired. When I got to your room I found the Destrier woman there. She told me she had changed with you because she was frightened to sleep in the east wing opposite poor Enid's room." His arm shot out and the rigid index finger of his hand pointed tremblingly, as it had pointed last night in the palm court, at Charles. "But you weren't afraid. By God, you weren't afraid! And what I want to know is, ***why*** weren't you afraid? Why this quixotic business when the girl could've gone and slept with any of the

other women. *Why* did you want to sleep in the east wing opposite the study, eh? Answer me that, you swine! Answer me that and don't stand there pretending to be a gentleman and not hearing! There are a lot of *whys* I've got to ask about you, Mr. Fox-Browne, or whatever your name is. . . ."

A leaf of the big double doors opened and Maud Vassar came into the room on light, slow-moving feet.

Charles stood up. He paid no attention to the now silently mouthing man at the far end of the table. He said: "Good-morning, Lady Maud." He saw that her eyes, although there was a shadow in them, yet looked at Lester with a tinge of amusement. He saw that it would be useless, in the face of the other's hysteria, assumed or real, to pretend that nothing had happened. He said, accordingly, nodding his head in Lester's direction: "He still dislikes me. If I could get a word in I'd show him he's unreasonable. Sorry for the scene. Not my making."

Maud Vassar moved round to a chair facing Charles's. She sat and Charles walked round the table to ring the bell for her. Lester stood, pointing no longer, but still glaring at Charles. Suddenly he put up a hand to his throat and tugged at his collar as if it were choking him. He looked at Maud Vassar as if about to speak, but apparently changed his mind. Thrusting back his chair with violence, he strode down the room with long, almost running strides, and was gone. The door slammed behind him.

Charles sat down. "Pity," he said.

The hazel eyes looked across the table into his. He seemed to see in them curiously shifting mists. She said: "I've always thought the man was unbalanced, or perhaps it's only liver; liver and lack of courage to face the inexplicable."

The service doors opened and there entered, unusually

for breakfast, Seton. His walk was the same as that of yesterday. His face was the usual impassive, predatory mask. But his voice, when he spoke, standing at Maud Vassar's side and asking what her orders were, was not the voice of yesterday. It was a voice too low and vibrant for normality. And his eyes were here, there, and everywhere; everywhere except upon the eyes of Charles who was. from across the table, looking steadfastly at him.

" All that I want," said Maud Vassar, " is a grapefruit."

Seton bowed. He did not speak but went back by the way he had come on feet preternaturally quiet. Four eyes watched him go; and saw that twice upon the journey his feet blundered in their stride.

The two pairs of eyes met across the white-clothed breakfast table. There was a silence, broken by the woman. She said:

" I'm sorry for him and for all the servants."

' Sorrier," Charles asked, " than for others?"

" Much," said the old lady with firmness, her light, clear voice suddenly louder. " We others are here either because we wish to be here or because in some way or other it advantages us to be here. The servants are here because they have to make their living by being here. Further, the others, as you call us, have had advantages which the servants have not had; advantages of intellectual training which should—although probably they don't—fit them to face with equanimity the terrible evidence of yesterday. . . ."

Charles raised his eyebrows. " Evidence?"

" Evidence," said Maud Vassar, as the door opened, this time to admit the parlourmaid Oakes, " that there are powers beyond men's powers."

4

Charles, leaving Maud Vassar seated upon the window seat in the dining room and gazing out through half-closed eyes at the garden, found himself, most unusually, with a definite lack of purpose in his movement. He remembered, even as he chid himself, that there were letters he should write. Thinking to find notepaper and pens in the office, he crossed the hall to its door and opened it, thereby getting his second shock of this odd morning. For the office was not empty as he had fully expected it to be. Before the fire stood Sandys, pallid and hollow-eyed. He was smoking furiously at a cigarette and regarding, with unreadable expression, two young women whose aproned backs were towards the door and whose be-capped heads were agitated like cow-parsley in a breeze.

"Sorry!" said Charles, and began to back out.

"Come in! Come in!" Sandys called. "Quite all right. Finished here."

Charles entered, closing the door behind him. He saw, crossing to his own table, that the two servants were Agnes Hicks, the housemaid, and Bolton, the house-parlourmaid. Sandys was saying to them:

"I'll bear in mind what you say. If you still feel the same when the police remove their orders, come to me again. If you don't, stay where you are and say nothing and I'll do the same."

With a fluttering of apron strings the two were gone.

Sandys looked across at Charles. "Just what I thought would happen," he said. "That's the first lot."

"Notice?" Charles looked up.

Sandys nodded. "You bet. And they were speaking not only for themselves but for two or three of the others as well. The boots for one, the cook for another,

and Oakes for another . . . Funny situation when you come to think of it!" He laughed mirthlessly. "Here are servants waiting to give notice and employers who can't let 'em go even if they wanted to, poor devils." He crossed the room with a slow, lagging stride most unlike his usual jaunty walk. He sat himself on the edge of Charles's table and from the stub of the cigarette which he held lit a fresh one. He said:

"Well, Fox-Browne, you struck it nicely, didn't you? A very pretty kettle of quite impossible fish! . . . I say, man, have you *thought* about this?"

Charles nodded.

"If you have," said Sandys, his eyes on the glowing end of the new cigarette, "you *must* have come to the conclusion that I've come to."

"Maybe." Charles's tone, if not his duosyllable, was encouraging.

"You must have come to the conclusion," said Sandys, his left hand beating out a nervous tattoo upon the top of Charles's table, "that . . . that . . . damn it! . . . you must have come to the conclusion that . . ."—he drew a deep breath—"that E. L. G. . . . that E. L. G.'s death wasn't caused by any human agency . . . It doesn't matter how sceptical one is, in fact, the more sceptical one is the more it ought to be borne in upon one. Nothing human *could* have killed E. L. G. Therefore it was something . . . something . . ." He broke off with a nervous laugh. He said: "I'm getting as bad as those damn girls. Wish I could take it like old Maudie. Damn it, Fox-Browne, I've knocked about the world a bit in my time and I did five years of it in the army, and I've seen a few things, and up to last night I've always thought I was pretty shock-proof. But last night showed me I wasn't. Not, my boy, by a long chalk!"

There came, before Charles could answer, if, indeed,

he were going to, a tap upon the door. In answer to Sandys's voice, Seton entered. He stood at the man-servant's version of attention. He said, still using that voice which was too low and vibrant for normality:

"Miss Lester-Greene's compliments, sir, and she wonders whether you would be good enough to go up and see her at once."

"Right," said Sandys, to add, as the door closed behind the servant:

"That's the fourth time this morning . . . Poor kid! I'm not unsympathetic, I hope, but I'm afraid her exaggerated opinion of me as a general djinn's going to cause me more trouble than I'm worth . . . If there's one thing I hate it's being relied on! It's nice once or twice, but it soon gets embarrassing . . . The worst of it is half my battle's going to be to counteract the very bad influence of Maudie. Maudie's been in there all night, and Maudie—though by God, Fox-Browne, I believe there's something in what she says—isn't a good influence for poor little Gladeyes at the moment. What Gladeyes wants is rest and avoidance of horror. She doesn't want insistence upon the supernatural. Not by a long chalk she doesn't! That'd be the way to send her bughouse. Wish you'd tell Maudie that if you get the chance."

Charles shook his head. "Wouldn't be any good."

Sandys stood up. His mouth twisted into the parody of a smile which did not touch his black-shadowed eyes. "You haven't heard Maudie," he said, "on the subject of Mr. Charles Fox-Browne. Otherwise you wouldn't say that. She hates your ideas, but she likes your manly reticence . . . Really, though, I wish you'd speak to her on this spook business. Whether she's right or wrong doesn't matter. She's got the whole household by the ears, walking about like that with her eyes shut and a sort of pitying smile over the whole of

her thin old body. She's a bit creepy herself, if you come to think of it . . . You try, there's a good fellah!" He swung on his heel and was gone, the door slamming behind him.

5

Contrary to his expectations, Charles was unable to find writing paper in the office. He thought of a pad which lay at the bottom of his trunk. He filled his pipe again and lit it and then rose. He had his fingers to the handle of the door when the bell of the main telephone rang shrill behind him. He turned back and lifted the receiver, to hear the thin, precise tones, easy to remember, of Sir Roger Amblethorpe.

"Is that Friar's Pardon?" said the telephone.

"Yes," said Charles. "Fox-Browne."

"Oh . . . Good man! Good man! Will you please tell Miss Lester Greene, or whoever's in charge of the household—what about that secretary fellah?—will you please tell them that myself and Inspector Willis will be at the house at noon and that we shall expect to see every one."

"Yes," said Charles.

"Can you tell me also whether my men are all right?"

"On the way down to breakfast," said Charles, "I passed two and they were all right. They said nothing, so the other couple must be."

"Thank you. Thank you," said the telephone. And then: "Fox-Browne, I wonder whether you have any theory. . . ."

Charles replaced the receiver with a loud, resounding click. He said, speaking aloud to himself for the second time in one day: "I'm so sorry, Sir Roger, we were cut off."

His pipe wedged into the corner of his mouth and his hands thrust deep into his pockets, he wandered

out of the room and up the stairs. He encountered no one until, at the door of the palm court, he was greeted with a civility almost servile by the burly Sergeant Holt, this morning a washed and brushed but unshaven figure. He answered the greeting and, bearing to his right, went down the long corridor of the west wing to his own room. As he passed the second door upon his right—the door of the room of Gladys Lester-Greene—it was opened and Sandys, his back to the corridor, stood in its mouth. Charles, passing with lounging, silent stride, heard from inside the room a quavering, tear-laden voice which at first he did not recognise, but which must, he decided, be that of the girl Gladys. It said:

"Oh! and Norman. Norman! Please come and see me again soon. Please. Please. *Please!*"

Charles could see nothing inside the room save a fluttering of black and white which he knew to be Thérèse. He passed on and turned right into the cross passage to his own room. He had his fingers on the handle of the door before he remembered. He pulled them away, but even as he did so, the door opened, pulled inwards from its other side.

Lesley stood where the door had been. Her eyes were clear and no longer were there dark half-moons beneath them. Her skin was like alabaster faintly tinged with an effulgent glow. Her hair was like a smooth and lovely headdress of hammered gold. Her clothes were of black and white and yet conveyed, by reason of the radiant life beneath them, an impression of colour more vivid than any actual colour could have been

Charles, who had, since he had first seen her, carried a perpetual picture in his mind of her, was aghast by the incompetence of this picture when compared with actuality. He was forced to make effort to keep untoward expression from his face. He said, smiling:

"I'm so sorry. I forgot. Writing paper I wanted There's some in my trunk."

Lesley looked at him. Her eyes, he found with a sudden unprecedented thrilling of his whole being, were this morning most definitely blue; a blue such as he had never seen before and would, he knew, never see elsewhere again. Her answering smile came slowly, but when it did come it was more than worth the anguished moment of waiting for its arrival. She took a pace backwards and held open her door. She said:

"Won't you come in? I haven't moved your things."

Charles went in. He began to walk towards the far corner where stood his trunk, but a voice stopped him.

"Please," said Lesley. "One moment!"

He turned sharp to face her. His gaze fixed itself upon her face. He found that he could not move his eyes from hers, and this made him glad and at the same time frightened. He felt that he was staring almost to the point of ill manners, but however much he tried to remove his eyes he could not. He knew that she was speaking, but only dimly, and as matters of secondary importance, heard her words. She was saying:

". . . can't begin to tell you what it meant to me! Ever since I've been here I've been in that awful room. I began to think the whole house was like that. Now I've slept in this one I realise it isn't . . . Do you know, Mr. Fox-Browne, I believe that if I had plucked up courage to go back there last night, I shouldn't be sane this morning." The deep voice was speaking in a whisper and a look of reminiscent horror widened the eyes. "I might even have . . . have died . . . perhaps in the way poor Enid . . ." The red, graciously full lower lip began to tremble, but was caught and subdued by white teeth. "If you hadn't found me still sitting in the palm court and behaving . . . be-

having like a silly child and then been so very, very good to me and made me change rooms . . . I, well . . . it's no good talking any more about it. All I can do is to say thank you and thank you and thank you."

From the back of Charles's throat came the strangled noises which are so often the answers to thanks or congratulations. With an effort which he found to his amazement left him trembling, he wrenched his gaze away. He turned and crossed over to the trunk and knelt beside it and rummaged in it haphazard. More by fortune than by judgment his hand struck almost at once upon the pad and envelopes for which he was looking. He rose to his feet with them in his right hand, letting the lid of the trunk slam back. He realised with a pang that his behaviour might seem boorish. He said, with a sudden rush of words quite unusual to him:

" Please don't think I'm ungrateful for your gratitude, but I don't want you to be grateful. It cost me nothing." He saw that the eyes which this morning seemed blue were over bright. Embarrassed and pitiful he dropped the gaze of his own. He said: " Really, you make too much of it. It was nothing. Slept better than I have for ages." He added, realising that he might be laying himself open to an accusation of callousness: " I'm afraid I'm used to death. Seen such a lot of it at one time and another." He could not keep his eyes away for long from the other eyes. He looked into them again and saw with a rush of relief that the unshed tears had retreated to their lovely source. They were smiling now.

" I couldn't very well," said Lesley Destrier, " think you heartless, if that's what you're getting at . . . Besides, I slept well myself. Oh! how well I slept."

They were standing now by the open doorway and, as if they moved by one mind, began at the same moment to walk. They passed through the door and by way of

the cross passage into the main corridor. They walked slowly and in a silence which yet was more comradely than speech. The doors upon each side of the corridor were now all closed. From behind them came no sound. They reached the mouth of the corridor and stood midway between the palm court doors and the stair-lobby.

"Have you," said the woman, breaking the silence, "heard . . . anything this morning?" She came to a halt.

Charles, halting simultaneously, turned to face her. "Anything new?" he said. "No."

The white fingers of Lesley Destrier went up to her mouth, their nails tapping upon white teeth while she pondered, gleaming head down-bent. She said, raising her head suddenly:

"It was a silly question, really." Her words came very slow and her voice was deeper even than usual. "Silly, I mean, because there naturally wouldn't be anything new because nobody will ever find out anything more . . . Will they?"

From the top of the stairs there came a sound of running feet upon the oak staircase and there appeared at their head Thérèse Gautier. She came, slacking her pace, directly to Lesley. She said, with a sidelong glance at Charles:

"Madame, Mademoiselle would be very pleased if you could come to see her. She is in her bed. Mademoiselle send me to fetch Madame. If Madame could be so good to come *immédiatement*. . . ."

Once more Lesley nodded. She said to Charles, with a smile which bedazzled him:

"I must go now . . . but you must tell me, please, whether you don't agree . . . We might meet, I suppose, before lunch. . . ." She turned on her heel and was gone, moving with a smooth unhurried and graceful speed in the wake of the fluttering Thérèse.

Charles stood gazing after her. Not until she had disappeared within the opened second door in the left-hand wall of the western corridor did he come to himself. He turned on his heel and made for the stair head, but before he reached it remembered his fountain pen. And his fountain pen was, he recollected, still in the pocket of his dinner jacket, and the dinner jacket was in the room which had been Lesley Destrier's. That which he had been wearing, together with toilet things, pyjamas and the clothes he wore now, were all he had hurriedly snatched last night before the change had been made. He remembered, walking towards the mouth of the eastern corridor, the whole scene. He was struck with a reminiscent but none the less poignant pang of compassion and something else. . . . He remembered how, coming back to the palm court after seeing Riley and Amblethorpe and Willis into their cars, he had found the doors closed with, before them, Holt and one of Holt's minions. He remembered how Holt, half hesitant, but supported in his action by the knowledge that this gentleman seemed friendly with the Powers, had diffidently spoken to him. . . " Sorry to trouble you, sir, but all the parties have gone to their rooms except one lady, sir, and she's in here. Seems to be unusually upset like about the idea of leaving . . ." He remembered the crouched, black-clad figure with wild-eyed white face and ruffled hair whom he had found curled, with a sort of iron desperation, into one of the armchairs by the bridge table. He remembered drawing a chair up and sitting close beside her and making her drink brandy. He remembered how she had at first refused to speak, but how, after his guess at what was her fear, she had unloosed a little torrent of words. . . . And he remembered the sudden half-ecstatic, half-unbelieving relief in her face when, after he had fetched those things

which he wanted, he had begun to take her to the room at the end of the western corridor. . . .

He came abreast of the door of his new room. He noticed that it stood ajar. Mildly wondering what servant he should find inside, he pushed it open, to wonder immediately what it was about this house which brought into such close relationship those above and below the salt. . . .

Seated upon the edge of the newly made bed was the Junoesque figure of Gertrude Fenner, only now she seemed, in her whole poise and in the expression of her dark down-bent face, less goddess than a queer blend of mother and mistress. Kneeling upon the floor, his head buried in her lap and both his hands clutching her left hand, was the lean, dark-clad form of Claude Lester. His shoulders were hunched and his whole body tense in its distorted attitude. And even as the astonished eyes of Charles first rested upon the tableau he saw something like a shuddering sob lift the shoulders and saw, too, how the free hand of the woman stroked the dark head.

Patently they did not hear him. He had walked, as usual, upon soft feet, and the door, as he had pushed it wider for his entry, had made no sound. A swift and cautious step backward took him once more out of their possible sight but, as he turned to face the way to the stairs, he heard the man's voice; a voice which would have been unrecognisable if sight, just now, had not shown who its owner was. It said, its words muffled a little:

"I can't stand it! I can't *stand* it, I tell you!" And then came an answering voice which said: "There! You rest; you rest!"

Charles walked away. As he reached the stair-lobby and turned right for the head of the stairs his right hand

came up and scratched reflectively at the back of his head.

6

He went downstairs and into the office again, but even here was no solitude; rather Sandys and the tall, this morning accentuated angularity of the cousin-turned-housekeeper.

" Sorry," said Charles and turned for the door again. But as he had when the two servants had been there, Sandys said: " Come in. Come in. . . . Matter of fact, Fox-Browne, perhaps you can help us. . . . By the way, you've met Mrs. Barratt, haven't you?"

The woman turned as Charles came forward. He was almost startled by the ravages which the night had worked with her face. The faded blue eyes seemed sunk deep into her head, and to have beneath their surface a dark smouldering flame. Her face was, actually, even thinner than it had been yesterday; new lines were cut in its thinness and the cheekbones looked to be almost bursting through the flesh. But she tried to smile, a wrenching of her face both pitiful and repellent. She said:

" Oh, yes; Mr. Fox-Browne and I had quite a little chat yesterday. Quite a little chat." Her voice, too, was different. It shook and seemed uncertain in what octave it was working. Her hands, hanging down at her sides, plucked nervously at the black stuff of her gown.

" Morning," said Charles. He answered the effort at a smile with a real one.

" Look here, Fox-Browne," Sandys said. " Mrs. Barratt's come in to tell me that other servants have been to her. They want to leave too. Two of them, cook and the other housemaid, say that it'll take force to keep them in the house. . . . Even Seton . . ."

"Excuse me, Mr. Sandys," said the wavering voice of the woman, "but I did *not* say that Seton wished to go before it was . . . was convenient!"

To Charles's ear there seemed an undercurrent of anger in her tones. "Seton would never do a thing like that! Never!" The voice had risen until it was now high pitched and steady and vehement.

"Sorry," said Sandys. "Sorry." He seemed to Charles to be concealing a smile and he looked at Charles with something that might have been a wink. . . . "Anyhow, Fox-Browne, I've told Mrs. Barratt that whatever the servants may or may not want to do in the way of clearing out, it will be quite impossible for them to do so just now if only for the reason that the police wouldn't let 'em. Mrs. Barratt seems to think that something might be done by speaking to the police and I'd like you to . . ."

Once more the woman interrupted. She said, looking at Charles: "I do so dislike, Mr. Fox-Browne, having unwilling service in the house. It makes trouble—more trouble, I expect, than you would believe possible. When I was speaking to Mr. Sandys I merely thought that if we were to speak to the Authorities they might be willing to let some of the servants go if necessary. . . ."

"And I," said Sandys, cutting in, "think they wouldn't. Now then, Fox-Browne, you seem to be half a policeman, judging by the way they all hung round you last night! What do you think?"

Charles spoke to the woman. "I'm afraid," he said, "that Mr. Sandys is right. For to-day at least, and probably until after the inquest, nobody will be allowed to leave the house. That's certain."

The woman drew herself up to the full of her considerable height. The smouldering flame in her eyes seemed to have burst its banking. She said in a voice which trembled no longer, but a voice which was different

from any which either of the men had ever heard her use:

"It's absurd! It's wicked! If the police are keeping people in this house it must be because they think that some one in this house was the cause of Enid's death, and if they think that they are fools and evil fools! Can they not see; do not the facts show them that it was impossible—incredible—that that death was caused by human hand . . . How often have I not told her, told her until I was tired of the sound of my own voice, told her until she threatened me with her dismissal . . . how often have I not told her that she was challenging stronger powers than any man's by using that room. . . . If she had listened to me, she wouldn't be the lump of clay that she is. But she wouldn't listen to me. She went on in her own vainglorious way and the end came for her." The strange voice ceased as abruptly as it had begun. She turned the blazing eyes on Sandys and then on Charles. She pivoted upon her heel and, with a slow, strong stride as unlike her usual walk as the voice had been unlike her usual voice, was gone from the room.

The door closed softly behind her. The two men looked at each other; Charles without expression in his face, Sandys with much.

"Well," said Sandys slowly, "I'll be damned!" He twitched his case from a pocket and opened it and lit a cigarette with a hand which shook. He looked, thought Charles, even more pallid and strained than he had an hour before. He looked at his watch. "When the hell," he said, "do those policemen come? Though what good they'll do . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. He looked intently at Charles. "I'm a convert," he said. "Damn it all, Fox-Browne, I am! This thing's been buzzing round and buzzing round in my head. I've looked at it from the top and from each side and from

underneath and there *is* no human explanation. Those women are right."

7

At five minutes past noon the Chief Constable came; with him this morning only Willis. They established themselves, at Sandys's suggestion, in the office. To them there reported, in camera, first Holt and then the three satellites who, with Holt, had spent the night in Friar's Pardon.

Charles and Sandys were in the hall when the last of the satellites came out. To them came Holt, who said:

"Chief Constable's compliments, gentlemen, and would you see as every one who's up is ready to come in and talk to him and Inspector Willis."

He made this remark into the air between the two men, but after it he turned direct to Sandys. "Also, sir, the Chief Constable says, would you be so good as to see that while he's talking to the ladies and gentlemen, the housekeeper or somebody gets the servants together."

And so it was Charles who collected, about an enormous fire in the billiard room, himself and Pursell and Lesley, Maud Vassar and Claude Lester. Sandys, with Mrs. Barratt, shepherded a white-faced little crowd into the dining-room. By the door of the dining-room stood Holt; by the door of the office the senior satellite; while a third satellite acted as runner between office and billiard room.

They took Pursell first. He muttered to Charles as he left the room: "Back in five minutes." But he was not back in five, nor ten, nor thirty minutes. He did not, in fact, return at all. But after three-quarters of an hour the runner came, to summon Maud Vassar, and they knew that Pursell had finished.

This time the runner was back within a quarter of an

hour, and now Lesley took her turn. Maud Vassar, unlike Pursell, came back to the billiard room. She said, as Charles placed a chair for her:

"I have met, I suppose, as many fools in my time as any old woman, but never, never have I met two such incorrigible idiots as those men in that room."

Lesley was gone a full half-hour, during which Charles fidgeted about the room. Maud Vassar sat, straight-backed but with closed eyes, in her usual chair. Crouched by the fire, his arms clasping his knees, Claude Lester sat silent and livid.

Lesley came back and Claude Lester went out. Charles, looking at Lesley, saw, with a sternly repressed catching of his breath, that all colour had again left her face and that once more the shadows were under her eyes. He set a chair for her. She took it with a murmured word of thanks which was hardly more than a whisper. He felt suddenly as far away from her as earlier in the morning he had felt close. Morosely he resumed his wanderings.

They were not so long with Claude Lester. Like Pursell, Claude Lester did not return, but within a quarter of an hour of his leaving the room, the runner came back, this time to say:

"Mr. Fox-Browne, if you please." . . .

Both Amblethorpe, rather effusively, and Willis, more restrained, seemed glad to see him. They looked, he thought, like men who are both exhausted and bewildered. Amblethorpe shook hands and offered his cigarette case. He said:

"Well, the further we get the more I feel certain, Fox-Browne, that this business is not open to any reasonable explanation. I do not consider myself a brilliant man, but I assume that I've got a certain amount of common sense, and common sense will show you that this killing, being impossible for man, cannot

have been man's." His voice was dejected to the point of querulousness. There was also in it a faint, subtle undercurrent of something very much like fear. He stood before the fire, facing Charles. Behind Sandys's table sat Willis, who nodded his badger's head.

"Having me on the mat?" said Charles at last.

Amblethorpe shook his head. "No point. We got all we could from you and Sandys last night. We had Pursell in here, of course, to ask him about that letter, but all we did there was to dig up a very nasty story which, if it hadn't been for the evidence of the letter I could hardly have believed. But as far as helping us with the elucidation of this . . . this death, it got us nowhere. The same with Mrs. Destrier. . . . And now," he sighed wearily, "we've got to do the servants. But we shan't get any further there." He seemed a very old man.

Charles looked at him, not without sympathy. He said: "Try going on with the routine stuff, but keeping your mind deliberately blank. Follow?"

Amblethorpe sank into one of the armchairs. He shook his head wearily. "I'm afraid I don't, Fox-Browne."

tures with his hands. "Forget that it seems impossible.

Charles was almost vehement. He actually made gestures with his hands. "Forget that it seems impossible. Just go on collecting stuff. When you've collected enough, chuck it in the pot, boil it, and then take it over again."

Willis rose from his chair behind the table and came round to the fire. He said:

"That's more or less what we're trying to do, sir, but if I may say so, it's impossible to forget the impossibility."

Charles lifted his shoulders, but did not speak.

"You see, sir," said Willis with a tired eagerness,

" there's no way of making it possible. That's what's beating Sir Roger and me. We've thrashed it out this way; we've thrashed it out that; but still we're faced with the thing's impossibility. There's the room, with its window shut on the inside and its door locked on the inside! There's no water inside the room and never has been, not even a flower vase full of water, and yet inside the room—which has its window shut on the inside and the door locked on the inside—a woman's *drowned*! Sitting in there alone she's terrorstruck by . . . something; so terrorstruck that she grabs for her house telephone and shouts through it for help. Then, after that shout for help, she is, within an impossibly short time, drowned with water that isn't there! And whatever did it is gone by the time you gentlemen get to the room, under a minute later. . . ." Willis's voice, which had been growing more and more weary as he drew near the end of his speech, died away altogether. He raised his hands, palms upwards, to the level of his shoulders, to let them fall again to his sides—an almost foreign gesture which did more to show the state of this Englishman's mind than would have a thousand words.

Amblethorpe, with a sudden renewal of energy quite admirable, got to his feet. He seemed to have taken command of himself once more. He said briskly:

" Very well then, Fox-Browne, if you've no point you want to discuss just yet, I think Willis and I'd better go on with the servants. I'd like to have you here, but I suppose in the interests of officialdom I can't." His tone was so apologetic that Charles made haste to put matters right. He said:

" Naturally . . . Tell you what I'd like." He looked at Willis. " I suppose you're going to make a written précis of all this stuff you're going to get to-day?"

Willis nodded and Amblethorpe said: "Of course; of course."

"Get me a copy by this evening?" Charles still looked at Willis.

Willis pondered, pulling at his lower lip. He said at last:

"Yes, I could do that, sir." His small dark eyes looked at Charles with a glimmer of hope in them. "I believe, sir," he said, "that you've got an idea."

Charles smiled a sudden smile. He shook his head. He said: "Following my own advice, that's all. The open mind."

He turned and made for the door. He said, over his shoulder: "The quicker I get out, the quicker you'll get finished."

The door shut behind him.

8

For the rest of the day the household seemed to Charles to be split into units self-contained, save when any one was summoned by Gladys to her room. For Sandys, Charles felt a certain pity; whoever else was wanted or not wanted in the room of the present mistress of the house, Sandys was a constant factor. It seemed that without the counsel and guide of Sandys, Gladys could do nothing. Whenever there seemed to be for Sandys ten minutes or so respite, it was sure to be broken by a summons from Thérèse. Charles, unsummoned and aching for the company of just one person within this house and refusing to admit this aching to himself, spent a lonely and wandering afternoon. . . . And all the time, willy-nilly, he drove the front half of his mind; drove it up to this problem as a man will drive an unwilling horse up to a fence. . . .

There was a sparse attendance at tea. Charles, Maud Vassar, playing hostess, and for three minutes—in which he gulped two stiff whiskies and sodas—Claude Lester. But there was no Lesley and no Pursell. Charles drank one cup and then another. He tried to talk to Maud Vassar, but she, this afternoon, was apparently in a state of something approaching *yoga*. Barely did she open her eyes and not once her lips.

Charles, who had been hovering between office, billiard room, bedroom and study—to which he was admitted upon order obtained from Holt—at six o'clock left the house. He carried with him an electric torch. He walked at first away from the house but came back, breathing hard after the violent exercise which he had felt himself to need, after twenty minutes. He did not immediately enter the house. Instead, he walked about it four times in all. It was not a continuous walk, for many times he halted and each time he halted he shone the white beam from the powerful torch up the whole length of the wall. Whether or no he were expecting fruit from this behaviour cannot be known, but it is plain that when he entered the house again, just as the big clock was striking seven, he was in evil and disappointed temper.

But at seven-thirty he cheered up. Seton brought to him as he sat by the fire in the billiard room a long and bulky foolscap envelope. It was addressed in a crabbed but clerkly hand to himself. "Thanks," he said. He did not look at Seton as he took the envelope, but he did look at Seton as the man, turning his back, walked doorwards. He saw that there was now no uncertainty, as there had been at breakfast, in the man's walk.

He slit the flap of the envelope and from it pulled a single page letter and a type document of many pages. The letter was from Willis. It ran:

" DEAR MR. FOX-BROWNE,

" As promised, I send you herewith a copy of the summary of our investigations so far—as they appear to me and as passed by the Chief Constable.

" The Chief Constable wishes me to say that he will be glad to see you at any time.

" Yours faithfully,

" A. WILLIS,

" Det. Ins."

Charles screwed the letter into a ball and hurled it into the fire. He sat back in his chair and crossed his legs and began upon the document. He read:

Summary of Information elicited by questioning of members of Friar's Pardon household, on 11th November, 193—

GENERAL

So far as can be ascertained, the life of the entire household throughout the day preceding the death was entirely normal except:

1. For certain disagreements which took place during luncheon and the time immediately after luncheon, concerning the stories of various members of the household, re " ghostly visitations," and

2. For certain interviews, dealt with in the tabulated evidence below, which the deceased held with her brother, Lord Pursell, Mrs. Destrier, and Thérèse Gautier (maid), upon the afternoon preceding the death.

Dinner was served at the usual time and conduct of all throughout the meal was normal. At approximately 8.50 the ladies retired upstairs to the palm court, an apartment only completed during that afternoon. (Note: All workmen connected with the setting up and furnishing, etc., of the palm court are proved to have left the house before 6.0 p.m. and not returned to it again.)

Five minutes or so later the gentlemen of the party also went to the palm court. After a few minutes conversation, Mrs. Lester-Greene retired to her study, stating that she did not want to be disturbed as she was working at a book. (Time approximately 9.15.) Major Lester, Lady Maud Vassar, Mrs. Destrier and Miss Lester-Greene remained in the palm court to play bridge. Lord Pursell and Mr. Fox-Browne went downstairs to the billiard room. Mr. Sandys, at Mrs. Lester-Greene's request, went into the study with her.

Between 9.40 and 9.45 Mr. Sandys, having dealt with the points which Mrs. Lester-Greene wished him to deal with, left the study and, after watching for a moment or two the hand of bridge in the palm court, went downstairs to the billiard room and then his office, into which (at approximately 9.50) he invited Mr. Fox-Browne and Lord Pursell.

At about 9.55 Mrs. Lester-Greene rang up Mr. Sandys to ask for some information in re her writing and he gave it to her. At approximately 10.0 o'clock the telephone rang again. This time it was answered by Lord Pursell, who heard Mrs. Lester-Greene's voice shouting: "Help! Help! For God's sake help!" Mr. Sandys, who had a second before left the room, returned at the sound of the ringing of the bell to find Lord Pursell and Mr. Fox-Browne rushing from the room. He joined them and was told during the run upstairs what Lord Pursell had heard. The party of three reached the study door in the palm court at approximately 10.1. They found the door locked. Mr. Sandys and Lord Pursell remained at the door while Mr. Fox-Browne climbed out of the palm court window and, struggling slowly along the narrow ledge, reached the study window. He found this window closed on the inside but broke it open with his hand, and opening the catch climbed in at the window. He

found the body of Mrs. Lester-Greene stretched out upon her divan. Life was undoubtedly extinct. He opened the study door and admitted Mr. Sandys and Lord Pursell, but did not admit Mrs. Destrier, who, having heard the shouts of Mr. Sandys and Lord Pursell, had rushed to the palm court.

In response to a telephone call from Mr. Sandys, the Chief Constable, accompanied by members of the County Constabulary, drove to the house and, together with Dr. Riley, was admitted at 12.20 a.m. *Dr. Riley gave it as his opinion (N.B. an opinion which he has since confirmed after autopsy) that death was caused by drowning. Dr. Riley also states that when he saw the body (at approximately* 12.30 *a.m.) life had been extinct for not less than one hour and not more than four hours.*

Further important points, to be noted equally with the words italicised above, are as follows:

1. *There was no trace of water in the room—not even any dampness upon the clothes or body of the deceased. This is certified by Dr. Riley as from* 12.30 *a.m., and also sworn to by Mr. Fox-Browne, Lord Pursell and Mr. Sandys as from* 10.6 *p.m.*

2. *There was no water, or liquid of any description (or traces of there having been same) within the room.*

3. *The window of the room was closed upon the inside.*

4. *The door of the room was locked upon the inside.*

5. *The shortest time which medical opinion will allow for suffocation by drowning of a normal human being is three minutes.*

6. *The time which elapsed between the telephone call for help and the arrival at the study door of the three gentlemen is one minute.*

7. *The time which elapsed between the telephone call for help and the breaking into the study window by Mr. Fox-Browne is five minutes.*

8. *There is no way of egress from the study except by the door or the window, the chimney a few feet up from the hearth being far too small a passage for any human body, even a child's.*

9. *The question of suicide can, for the reasons implied by the preceding points, definitely be ruled out.*

Seriatim Summary of Evidence

(a) Members of House Party

1. Lady Maud Vassar, questioned as to events on the night of Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene's death, states that she confirms time of deceased's retirement to study and commencement of bridge as " about a quarter or twenty past nine." States that one rubber of bridge was quickly completed " by about a quarter to ten," and that then she herself suggested adjournment for half an hour in order to write letters she had forgotten. States that this suggestion was well received by Mrs. Destrier and Major Lester, but opposed by Miss Lester-Greene. The bridge party did break up, agreeing to start again in half an hour's time, Major Lester looking at his watch and stating that the time for restarting would be " about 10.20." States that she proceeded immediately to her room, where she wrote the letters in question. She produced these letters. " At about a quarter past ten or a little before " she returned to the palm court to find there Mrs. Destrier, Major Lester, Miss Lester-Greene, Mrs. Barratt (housekeeper) and Seton (butler). From them she learned what had happened. Re-questioned as to times, stated that she could not be more definite. She had only looked at her watch once through the evening and that was when Mr. Sandys had left the study some time after Mrs. Lester-Greene's retirement thereto and had come over to watch the bridge for a moment. The

time was then 9.45. Finally questioned as to the general relations existing between deceased and members of the house party states that " she knows nothing about any of this, not being much interested in ordinary human contacts." Does mention, however, that on the afternoon of the day of the death there seemed a " slight friction " between Mrs. Lester-Greene and her daughter and brother, though whether this friction was due to disagreement concerning " certain psychic phenomena," of which certain members of the household professed to be aware, could not say. Her own attitude towards Mrs. Lester-Greene was " one of friendly acquaintanceship." She had not known Mrs. Lester-Greene intimately before. She had accepted the invitation to Friar's Pardon because of her interest in psychic matters and the opportunities which she felt might be offered her in the house for " extra-spiritual " experiences. Questioned as to whether she herself had experienced any " psychic phenomena " since going to stay at Friar's Pardon Lady Maud would give no comprehensible reply. Verbatim: " It can serve no useful purpose for me to discuss such matters with you. I am afraid that we should not, in a hundred years, agree even as to the meaning of the two words psychic and phenomena." She refused to add anything further to this remark at this stage.

2. MISS LESTER-GREENE (at present unfit to answer questions) has made written statement which deals with the bridge party and confirms Lady Maud Vassar's evidence above. Statement also says that on break in bridge party she " went to her room and pottered about."

3. MRS. CONWAY DESTRIER, questioned as to events on the night of Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene's death, confirms evidence of Lady Maud Vassar above in regard to bridge party. Cannot confirm time, however, stating " I never seem to know the time at all." States that at break in

bridge party she went to her room, where she busied herself for " something like a quarter of an hour " with accounts and the checking of her pass book, etc. States she was intending to go back to the palm court when, opening her door, she heard a " dreadful sound—hammering and shouting." She rushed across to the palm court to find Mr. Sandys and Lord Pursell knocking at the study door and trying to get an answer from within. When Mr. Fox-Browne opened the study door from the inside, states he did not allow her to go inside, but she gathered that Mrs. Lester-Greene had met with some accident and was dead. Collecting herself and turning to leave the palm court to inform the rest of the household, she was met by Major Lester. She told him and then, feeling faint, sat down. He went away to return with Miss Lester Greene and Mrs. Barratt. Major Lester then rang the bell and summoned Seton and broke the news to him, just before Lady Maud Vassar's return to the palm court. Questioned as to the general relations existing between deceased and members of the house party, states that she knows nothing of any one else's affairs, " having been for some time too much wrapped up in her own to take much notice of other people's." Further questioned in regard to diary entries, etc., Mrs. Destrier explained that deceased (who was her aunt by marriage) had, since the divorce of Mr. Conway Destrier, made her an allowance. There had been talk of deceased's advancing capital for a business which Mrs. Destrier was to start, but upon the day of her death, deceased had finally decided against this. Asked it there had been any quarrel in regard to this, Mrs. Destrier replied: " No *quarrel*—disagreement possibly. Quarrel, no." She would not add to this statement. Questioned as to whether she herself had experienced any " psychic phenomena " since going to stay at Friar's Pardon, states that she had " had some experi-

ences in the house which had been impossible to explain ordinarily." Seemed reluctant to give definite information, but at last explained that she had on several occasions at night heard curious noises inexplicable by ordinary standards and upon the night before the murder had heard a tapping at her window and seen a hand " which shone with a sort of light of its own " which tapped outside her window. Was in no state to answer further questions on this subject.

4. LORD PURSELL OF MITCHAM, questioned as to the events on the night of the death of Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene, states that after coffee in the palm court he went downstairs to conclude a game of billiards with Mr. Fox-Browne. He particularly noticed the time as they entered the billiard room. It was 9.20. " About twenty minutes later," Mr. Sandys came into the billiard room and invited the players into his office. They went. They " played shove-ha'penny and had the odd spot." They had been playing about five minutes when there was a telephone call on the single line instrument from the study that Mr. Sandys answered, giving some information required by deceased. " About five or ten minutes after that " the single line telephone rang again. Mr. Sandys had that moment left the room and Lord Pursell answered it himself. States he heard a cry of " Help! Help! For God's sake help!" definitely in deceased's voice. Mr. Sandys came back into the room just as he was hearing the cry.

(In the margin at this point of the report was a note in pencil signed A. W. which ran: " In order to get this to you in time have omitted evidence of Pursell and Sandys from this point. It is very long and you know it all all right. It will, of course, appear in the full summary which I am officially preparing and of which I will send you a copy.")

Questioned as to general relations existing between deceased and members of the house party, Lord Pursell states that he " hadn't bothered his head. There certainly have been a few atmospherics, but I never worried about 'em." Questioned as to his own relations with deceased and shown a letter which deceased had apparently written to him just before her death, Lord Pursell became confused. He made a long statement, of which the following is a very brief note. It appears that eighteen months ago Lord Pursell met deceased and Miss Gladys Lester-Greene in Switzerland. Lord Pursell was with his mother, the Dowager Lady Pursell. A strong friendship appeared to spring up between deceased and Lady Pursell, who apparently agreed that it would be very desirable to make a match between Miss Lester-Greene and Lord Pursell. Lord Pursell states that " he was never very keen on the idea " but " toyed with it for the mater's sake, thinking it might be possible." After a month or two, however, before any definite engagement was announced, he found that his feelings would not permit him to continue, and he began to see less and less of the Lester-Greenes. Verbatim: " gradually cooling off, if you follow me." Six months ago he considered " the whole business finished with," but recently was surprised by a call from deceased. Deceased informed him that she had set her heart upon his marrying her daughter, " as she was convinced that this was the best thing for them both." She was not prepared, she said, to allow Lord Pursell to " fade away." She had had inquiries made about Lord Pursell and had unearthed the fact that when at Oxford he had been the protector of a certain Miss Lottie Ricardo. He had not, however, informed this woman of his real name. Ever since relations had been broken off this woman had been seeking for Lord Pursell in order either to extort money from him or to sue him for

alleged breach of promise. In brief, deceased's suggestion to Lord Pursell was that if he did not resume his friendship with her daughter and let this friendship ripen into engagement and finally marriage she would be reluctantly compelled to inform Ricardo both of his whereabouts and his actual name—a position which would have been very serious indeed for Lord Pursell. Under pressure Lord Pursell had accepted the invitation to Friar's Pardon and during his stay there had been undecided how to behave. Upon the afternoon preceding her death he had had an interveiw—at which bitter words were used on both sides—with deceased, and she had stated that she would give her final decision, as to whether or not she would use her information, upon the following day, hence the letter. Questioned as to whether he himself had experienced any " psychic phenomena," states that " several odd things had certainly happened, not exactly what you might call ga-ga, just odd "; instanced noises, moving of night wear, etc.

5. MAJOR CLAUDE LESTER, questioned as to events on the night of Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene's death, confirms the evidence in regard to the movements of the bridge party given in the paragraphs above. States that at the adjournment of the bridge party " he went downstairs and had a drink," and then returned upstairs and went to his own room at the end of the east wing. Here he wrote a letter. He was unable to produce this letter, stating that it had not satisfied him and he accordingly had burnt it. " At about a quarter past ten " he walked back to the palm court and there found Mrs. Destrier. Confirms her evidence as to subsequent events. Questioned as to general relations existing between deceased and members of the household, states that " these were uncomfortable as regards myself and Lesley Destrier and possibly Pursell." Asked to amplify, explained that he knew the situation in regard to Mrs. Destrier

and he thought from Lord Pursell's manner at times there was some embarrassment of some kind existing between Lord P. and deceased—" something to do with Pursell and Gladys." In regard to his own relations with deceased, states that " she always kept me too short of money. Wouldn't let me get a job because there was no need for me to work when she had a lot of tin. But lately she kept on putting on the screw. I'm afraid we were always rowing, partly my fault, no doubt." Questioned as to whether he himself had experienced any " psychic phenomena," Major Lester behaved very curiously. Refused to give chapter and verse and would only keep repeating " I have nothing definite to tell you but I know there's *something.*" All efforts to induce him to particularise more closely failed, although there was one reference to " noises."

6. NORMAN SANDYS, questioned as to the events on the night of Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene's death, confirms that deceased went into her study at 9.15. He followed her immediately and was there " for about twenty minutes. They were going over correspondence and also discussing, for the latter part of the time, the work which deceased was to do that evening. Just before his dismissal deceased asked him whether he would, as he often did, stay downstairs in his office in case she should want him. She was going to write that night rather than dictate as she sometimes did. He did not bid her good-night as he felt certain he would see her again. Leaving the study, he walked over to the bridge table and stayed for a moment watching the play. He then went downstairs, feeling that he would like company. (Verbatim: " I had had a trying day and was not looking forward much to solitude.") He went to the billiard room and invited Lord Pursell and Mr. Fox-Browne, who had just completed a game started before dinner, whether they would join him. They did so. He

produced a " shove-ha'penny " board and they played. They had been playing about five minutes when the telephone bell rang and deceased asked him a question about an incident in the earlier part of the manuscript upon which she was working. He looked up the manuscript and gave the answer. There was nothing unusual in deceased's request or voice. A few minutes later, in response to a request by Mr. Fox-Browne, he left the room to go upstairs and see how much longer the bridge four would continue. As he reached the foot of the stairs, however, he heard the private line telephone from the study buzzing again. He turned and went back into the room to find Lord Pursell answering the call.

(In the margin here there appeared another pencil note, signed A. W. It ran: See my note in Pursell's evidence above.)

Questioned as to general relations existing between deceased and members of the house party, he was too busy, really, to pay much attention. Certainly deceased had been at times difficult to get on with and he believed she had had friction at one time and another with her brother, possibly on money grounds; with Mrs. Destrier on some questions, he believed, of providing capital; and with Lord Pursell in some connection of which he had never known anything. In reply to a further question, Mr. Sandys stated that so far as he knew, relations between deceased and her daughter were " fairly normal. Very affectionate, certainly, upon the side of Mrs. Lester-Greene, although she was sometimes a bit inclined to be overbearing." Questioned as to whether he himself had experienced any " psychic phenomena," Mr. Sandys states that he " most definitely had." He referred to inexplicable noises during the night and occasionally during the day-time; to a remarkable incident connected with the key of his bedroom door and to the

indisputable (to him) evidence of the " aggregate experiences " of the household. He further volunteered that he himself and Mrs. Destrier—and also, he believed, Lady Maud Vassar—had endeavoured to dissuade deceased from using the two rooms which she had had made into her study, as it was in these rooms that the deaths of the old-time owners of the house had taken place. Concluded statement by saying, " when I came to Friar's Pardon I definitely did not believe in spiritual phenomena of any kind. Since I have lived at Friar's Pardon I have altered my belief!" Asked finally as to the meaning of a memo found in deceased's diary, Mr. Sandys states that a complaint must have been made to deceased upon the afternoon preceding her death by Thérèse Gautier, the French maid of Miss Gladys Lester-Greene. It must have arisen out of an incident of the afternoon. He came out of his room and met Gautier face to face. She stumbled, and in an endeavour to keep her from falling he caught her in his arms. She then " held up her face invitingly, and without thinking I kissed her. I don't suppose anything would have been said at all had it not been that Mr. Fox-Browne happened to be coming along to see me and witnessed the incident. As soon as she saw she was seen the little cat slapped my face." Further states that from his knowledge of deceased she would not have taken this incident at all seriously, being quite well aware of the sort of girl that Thérèse Gautier was. Asked as to the meaning of that part of the memo which referred to informing Miss Lester-Greene of Gautier's complaint, Mr. Sandys could not offer any explanation.

7. CHARLES FOX-BROWNE. Not yet questioned as fully as the above. Evidence as to events from the time of leaving the palm court after coffee until discovery of the body tallies with that of Mr. Sandys and Lord Pursell, etc., given above.

(b) OTHER MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

1. MRS. REGINALD BARRATT (HOUSEKEEPER), questioned as to the events on the night of Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene's death, states that she spent the evening from " about 6.30 p.m. until about 10.0 " in her own sitting room on the second floor. At ten she came downstairs and went to the kitchens. She returned, using the main stairs, " at about quarter past ten," and outside the palm court door met Major Lester, who informed her of the tragedy. Questioned as to the general relations existing between deceased and members of the household, Mrs. Barratt states " although I was a cousin of Mrs. Lester-Greene's I was employed as her housekeeper. As a housekeeper it is not my duty to pry into the affairs of my employer or her guests. I did my duty but I did not exceed it." She would make no further statement. Her behaviour throughout the interview was distinctly strange. Questioned as to whether she herself had experienced any " psychic phenomena " while in the house, she refused to give a definite answer. All that she would say was " the Almighty works His will according to His infinite knowledge and goodness." (The Chief Constable has ordered a further examination of this witness, if this can be carried out before the inquest.)

2. HENRY THEODORE SETON (BUTLER), questioned as to the events on the night of Mrs. Enid Lester-Greene's death, states that he went about his duties on the ground floor in the ordinary way. At " about ten minutes past ten " he heard the bell from the palm court, and going upstairs was met by Major Lester, who told him of the tragedy. Questioned as to the general relations existing between deceased and members of the household, states that he " knows nothing about that sort of thing." Questioned as to " psychic phenomena," states although

he has heard many complaints from servants he has not had any unusual experience whatsoever himself.

(Note: The remainder of the servants, for the purposes of brevity and also because their evidence is identical, are placed in two groups. The first group contains those who were in the servants' hall until after the discovery of the death, and the second contains those who were in their bedrooms on the second floor before the time of the discovery.)

GROUP 1.—NANCY OAKES (PARLOURMAID).
ELSIE BOLTON (HOUSE PARLOURMAID).
MRS. CLOUGH (COOK).

These three were sitting in the servants' hall from the time when their work was finished at approximately 9.30 until the time (after half-past ten) when the news was broken to them. Their stories are all inter-corroborative. Clough was reading and Oakes and Bolton were alternately chatting and playing a card game. From preliminary questioning it was discovered useless to ask any of these three to give opinions as to the relations of the various members of the house party. Questionings, however, as to " psychic phenomena " produced very fruitful answers. All three agreed on night noises. Mrs. Clough told of several experiences, the main of which was that it was impossible to keep her bedroom door closed: when she locked it the key—as she proved one night by having Agnes Hicks to sleep with her—was " plucked out from the key-hole " and the lock then turned and the door opened. Elsie Bolton told of the left-hand leaf of the dining room door which frequently opened by itself, and Nancy Oakes very reluctantly told of a similar experience to that of Mrs. Destrier's given above. All three were in a state of advanced nerves.

GROUP 2.—THÉRÈSE GAUTIER (LADY'S MAID).
AGNES HICKS (HOUSEMAID).
GERTRUDE FENNER (HOUSEMAID).
FREDERICK ROGERS (BOOTS).

These four were in their bedrooms in the western wing of the second floor; Agnes Hicks and Gertrude Fenner sharing the latter's room at the end of the corridor nearest to the service stairs; Fred Rogers in his small room at the farther end of the corridor, and Thérèse Gautier in her room opposite. Hicks and Fenner went to bed at 9.15; Rogers at 9.30, and Thérèse Gautier, earlier released from late duty for that evening by Miss Lester-Greene, a few minutes later. Fred Rogers, apparently as usual, read until 10.15 and then slept. He heard nothing. Thérèse Gautier slept immediately. She heard nothing. Hicks and Fenner did not sleep. Hicks, owing to her nerves having been upset by certain events in the house, was in a condition of illness, and Fenner was soothing and looking after her. They had their door open for the whole night but they heard nothing. (Note: No one could have passed their door and gone down the service stairs, they both affirm, without being heard. There is no door from this western servants' wing into the main stair lobby of the second floor.) Gautier was the only one of this group who offered any opinion on the relations of the household, and her opinions were so obviously tinted by imagination as to be almost worthless. She appears to see illicit sex intrigue in ordinary everyday actions. Definitely not to be taken seriously. On the subject of " psychic phenomena " three of this group had stories to tell. Gautier's a history of terrifying night noises to which, however, she seemed almost used; Hicks mentioned night noises and also Mrs. Clough's opening door which she had witnessed herself, and also many inexplicable breakages,

one instance in particular of a vase which had " broken itself " and another of a plate which she had seen " with her own eyes jump off the dresser and smash itself against the opposite wall." Fred Rogers was incoherent but generally corroborative of night noises, etc. Fenner, however, was different. She states that personally she had had no experience whatsoever of anything out of the ordinary. Was very quiet and reserved in her answers.

CHAPTER XII

THE EXORCIST

I

It was very dark. It was also very cold. But John Robarts, the stud groom, was up and about, for one of his charges—the only one, he frequently used to say, worth more than a five pound note—was sicker than John Robarts liked. And the drench had to be given every four hours.

John came out of Medallion's loose box, carefully bolting both halves of the door behind him. He turned left and walked out of the stable yard towards the steps at the side of the harness room which led up to his living place. When he had come out ten minutes before, his eyes had not accustomed themselves at all to the cold darkness, but now, dimly, he could make out familiar shapes upon his way. And so it was that as he got abreast of the harness room door he halted. There was something . . . something wrong with this corner of the yard. . . . Something missing. . . . He pushed back the cap which covered his bald head and scratched at his scalp with a reflective second finger. . . . Something missing! Yes, that'd be it. . . . Something wasn't there which did ought be. . . .

O'course! . . . The ladder. The ladder which always stood leaning against the harness room wall.

John screwed up his toothless old mouth until his usually invisible lips showed themselves in an elliptic O. In the ordinary course of events he might—especially at such an hour as this and in such frigidity—have taken no notice of the ladder's absence. But these were odd, strange times. . . .

He wondered where the ladder could be and who had taken it to wherever it was. He remembered distinctly that at one o'clock when he had come down to see Medallion the ladder had been there. He could still feel a slight aching in his toe where he had stubbed his foot.

He was a courageous old man, with the reputation of having been something of a terror in his youth. He was also an old man of inquiring mind. Still whistling soundlessly, he clambered up the narrow wooden steps to the quarters which he shared with Morlas, the chauffeur. . . .

Within fifteen minutes he stood shoulder to shoulder with Morlas at the foot of the ladder. It was standing to one side of the projecting portico of the front of the house. Its feet showed through the darkness, very black against the faintly glimmering hoar frost which covered the earth. Its length reached up into impenetrable darkness, but its head must be resting, they knew, against the room which had been the study of their mistress. They had worked round the house from the southern corner of the western wing before they had found it. Morlas had grumbled. Now he grumbled no longer. He was an alert and humorously pugnacious person, unafraid of God, Man and Devil. He stood now, bending back his neck to strain his gaze up through the darkness.

"What'll us do, John?" His voice was a piercing, rattling whisper.

Through the night came a faint hissing from the lips of John. "Quiet for a start. . . . Wait till the blank comes down."

Morlas, subduing the whisper, made complaint. He wanted, he said with emphasis and some obscenity, to mount the ladder and seek what might be at its other end. But he allowed himself to be overruled. The savageness of the old man's muttered imprecations turned his wrath to silent laughter and he waited.

Cold-footed minutes passed like hours. After ten of them which seemed like twice as many, the younger man, patience exhausted by discomfort and inaction, shuffled nearer to his companion. His mouth opened to speak but no words came from it, for through the blackness came a hard and horny old palm which clapped itself over his mouth and a hissing voice which said into his ear:

"Quiet now! Lissen a' that!"

Morlas listened. He heard from somewhere in the night above his head—from somewhere on the surface of the great, looming bulk of the house which they could feel rather than see—a faint sound. A thin, scraping, cautious rustle.

He held his breath. He felt suddenly that he wanted to sneeze; that he must sneeze. He set his mind to prevent the sneeze. It succeeded, but not in full measure. There burst from behind his closely gripping hand a small, strangled, snort-like sound. Perhaps loud enough to be heard by whoever or whatever was making that noise at the head of the ladder. Perhaps—by good fortune—not. The claw-like fingers of his companion's right hand sank viciously into the biceps of his left arm. They waited, now in utter silence. After a moment there came to their ears another noise from above them—a soft noise, indescribable. Morlas, a sudden flash of ingenuity lighting his quick Cockney brain, leaned for-

ward and put cautious hand upon the fourth rung of the ladder. His fingers felt immediately a slight vibration. . . . Something—some one—was coming down.

He waved wildly in the air with his left hand, seeking to attract old John's attention. He got it. His fingers brushed the sleeve of the ancient cardigan. From the contact he realised that the old man was ready and braced. He stood back himself, slipping his right hand into his pocket and withdrawing it again with the four rings of a heavy knuckle-duster securely in place.

There was a faint squeaking upon the frozen gravel as the foot of the ladder shifted infinitesimally under the descending weight.

The right arm of Sydney Morlas, its hand bunched into a brass-weighted fist, drew back. . . . The descent he could sense, was a slow and cautious one. He smiled to himself in the darkness: somebody was going to get a packet. . . .

Twenty full and crowded seconds later he struggled to his feet, bent double still and still gasping. His breathing, painfully coming back, was a series of whooping gasps. His head seemed bursting, and his back—as is always the case when a man is severely winded—felt as if it had been broken. With slow, painful movements he managed to get his left hand to his jacket pocket and from the pocket pull out the small torch which he had not yet used. Holding it in a hand which wavered with his breathing, he shone an unsteady flicker of light about him. Presently the white shaft rested upon what its director sought, the figure of John Robarts.

John Robarts was sitting upon the ground. His legs were spread wide and both hands clasped to his stomach. Upon his face there was a look of utter and wide-eyed and outraged surprise. His mouth was a large O; his eyes two smaller o's

Between his gradually lessening whoops Morlas began to giggle. He said, in painful gasps:

"Sez to . . . m'self . . . sez some'un's goin' . . . to get . . . a packet. . . . They did. . . . You an' me! . . ."

That cautious descent of whatever it had been down the ladder had been changed, so suddenly as if to appear by magic, into a sliding, tearing rush. A large and solid shape had appeared between the two men. Something apparently weighing several hundredweight had struck violently against the solar plexus of Sydney Morlas and almost simultaneously something apparently as long and agile as the tail of a serpent had hitched itself about the legs of John Robarts and brought him to earth with a bump which had rattled his aged bones.

"There *may*," said Morlas to the greying dark, "be bogies in this 'ere mansion! But what I *do* know's this: that thing what slammed me in the basket—that's no more a bleeding ghost than what I am."

"Unk!" said the figure on the ground.

2

It was noon and people were flocking from Friar's Pardon. Pressmen from London; pressmen from the County town; pressmen with notebooks; pressmen with cameras; pressmen with telegraph blanks; policemen in uniform; policemen out of uniform; a small, wild herd of unsatiated public; the coroner himself and his entourage.

In the centre of the billiard room the trestle tables stood like untidy, gaunt skeletons and the room's gracious furnishings sulked shamefaced in orderly, unbeautiful lines against the walls. . . . In the servants' hall, the rigidity of etiquette for once dissipated by the importance of an occasion, Mr. Henry Theodore Seton

stood surrounded by a white-faced, gaping, gabbling little flock. In the dining room Norman Sandys, his pale face showing strain but his manner and manners most admirably suited to the occasion, played vicarious host to a little crowd of relatives and publishers and publicity-mongers. In the room at the end of the west wing which once had been Charles's, Lesley Destrier lay a small, relaxed heap like a child utterly wearied. Upon the other side of the passage Gladys Lester-Greene, murmuring " Norman, Norman," and trembling like an old man with ague, was being tenderly helped, by a Thérèse for once silent, back to the bed from which she had struggled. In what had been the study, sitting straight-backed and with closed eyes in the great chair at the writing table, sat Maud Vassar. In her sitting room upon the third floor, Helen Barratt knelt by her bed, her hands covering her face and her lips moving to wild, soundless prayer. And in the office which now very probably would never be even partially his, Charles Fox-Browne gave whiskies and sodas to Amblethorpe and Willis.

" And that's to do," said Charles, jerking his head in a gesture which somehow decisively referred to the billiard room and what had been happening in the billiard room, " all over again?"

The Chief Constable nodded. He looked, thought Charles not without sympathy, every one of his sixty-five years, whereas two days before one could have taken him—and many did—to be ten years younger.

" Surely. Surely," he said. " I'm afraid we always have to do that in cases where there are complications. First inquest is just what we had this morning. Formal identification of body and so on." He sighed and took a long drink from his glass and sighed again. " Nevertheless," he said, " we might just as well have finished it all to-day. . . . At least, that's my opinion."

Willis grunted. "I'm afraid you're right, sir." He, too, seemed aged. "There'll be no getting to the bottom of this, because there's no bottom to get to. None that a man can tell of anyhow."

"I suppose," said Amblethorpe slowly, looking into the fire, "that I must ask Miss Lester-Greene whether she would like us to call in Scotland Yard?"

Willis shifted uneasily in his chair, opened his mouth to speak and then, changing his mind, kept silent.

"Shouldn't worry," Charles said. "She'll say no. Talked to her last night with Sandys. He asked. She said what you've just said."

"Really!" Amblethorpe's eyebrows endeavoured to meet his grey hair. "Now that it most grat . . . I should say most . . . Anyhow, I think she's wise. . . . I must say it surprises me, though. . . . Yes, she's very wise. She's got more sense than I gave her credit for, I must say." He looked at Charles with a trace of belligerence. "At any rate she's wise enough to see what every thinking man or woman must see; that is, that this business, however much we may violate our previous opinions by thinking so, hasn't got any . . . any . . . well, human explanation."

Charles sat himself down upon the edge of the table which had been going to be his. He said, looking at Willis:

"Seen the chauffeur and groom?"

Surprisingly Willis flushed. He said, almost under his breath:

"Yes, sir."

Amblethorpe turned in his chair. "What's this! What's this!"

Willis got up. He said, still looking like a child detected in a ridiculous but not too wicked misdemeanour: "I didn't want to worry you just yet, sir; in fact, I haven't had time. The groom here, a man called Robarts, and

the chauffeur—name of Morlas—came to me as soon as we got here this morning. Why they didn't report to Holt I don't know. I'm afraid I gave them a piece of my mind for not having done so. Be that as it may, sir, they came to tell me that at five o'clock this morning, or thereabouts, Robarts—who happened to be up attending to a sick horse—noticed that the twenty-foot ladder which usually stands in the stable yard was missing. He knew it had been there at one o'clock in the morning and so he decided to investigate. He waked Morlas and together they walked round the house, eventually finding the ladder just beside the front portico and apparently leading up to the windows of the study. . . ."

"Eh!" said Amblethorpe, shooting to his feet. "What's this! What's this!"

"The ladder, sir," said Willis, once more imperturbable, "was apparently leaning against the study window. Morlas and Robarts waited at the foot thinking that whoever was at the top of the ladder must descend and they would be able to nab him by surprise when he did. . . . Unfortunately, however, whoever it was must have been aware that they were waiting for him, for he came down the ladder in what Morlas describes as "a sortover kindover rush" and laid the two of 'em out and got away without them even so much as getting a sight of him."

Amblethorpe put up a hand to his head. He said, almost stammering: "But . . . but . . . this means that there's some one. . . . This may mean that we were wrong. . . . No, it can't do that. . . ." He sank wearily back into his chair. He looked first at Willis and then at Charles. "What *does* it mean?" he said at last. "Willis, why didn't you tell me before?"

Once more Willis showed signs of embarrassment. "There was hardly time, sir, and also after I'd got over

my first surprise, I realised that however odd this incident might be it could not in any way affect the death of Mrs. Lester-Greene."

"That's all very well, Willis." Amblethorpe became for an instant very much the superior officer. "That's all very well, but you've got to make inquiries. You've got to make inquiries."

"Of course, sir." Willis's tone managed to be at once soothing and briskly submissive. "In fact I started Holt off on them before the inquest opened. He called me out of the court and gave me an interim report about half an hour ago. Nobody's missed anything in the house and as all the windows of the first storey along the whole of the front of the house were shut on the inside, it doesn't seem . . ."

Once more Amblethorpe got to his feet. The fraying of his nerves showed in his querulous bark. "I don't want to hear anything about *seeming*. What I want by three o'clock this afternoon is a full, definite report. Do you understand that, Willis?"

"Yes, sir." Willis, like a chameleon, faded into his background.

Amblethorpe looked at Charles. "Well," he said, "and what do you make of it, Mr. Fox-Browne? As far as I can see, it's very serious; very serious indeed. I'm inclined to agree with what Willis says about it not making any difference, but on the other hand you've got to admit that it is . . . well, rather sinister." He wheeled round suddenly "Willis," he barked. "These two men: did they make any suggestion when they told you of this happening . . . did they suggest in any way that this thing that came down the ladder was not . . . was not . . ."

Willis came forward. He shook his head. "No, sir. There was no suggestion of any phenomenon. They're both quite plain about that." Almost he smiled. "In

fact rather humorously so. They both definitely state that what attacked them was a man—and a strong man at that."

Once more Amblethorpe turned to Charles. "You haven't answered me yet, Fox-Browne. What do you make of it? . . . Stop a moment, though." He sighed with sudden and immense relief. "I was forgetting. . . . Do you know it had occurred to me that if this ladder could be used last night, it could have been used the night before. In other words, that somebody could have got out of the study by the ladder and taken it away before . . ."

Charles interrupted. "No, they couldn't. Not if you take my word for it. Windows were shut on the inside."

"Exactly," said Amblethorpe, "what I remembered. And anyway there wouldn't have been time. Quite definitely there wouldn't have been time. And then there's the drowning. . . . God! This is a ghastly business!" His tone on these last six words was suddenly hushed.

There was a silence broken by Charles. He said: "Shouldn't worry too much about that ladder."

Willis, with a sudden eagerness, took a step forward. Amblethorpe cocked his head. "What's that?" he said. "What d'you mean?"

"Tell you," said Charles, getting up from the table, "this afternoon. Want to call on you. Got a lot to say."

The right fist of the Chief Constable descended upon the arm of his chair with a soft thud. "Why the blazes," he said, "don't you say it now?"

Charles shook his head. "Not ready. Bit more thinking to do."

"Excuse me, sir"—Willis's voice was suavely insistent—"but if you tell us not to worry about the ladder,

I think you ought to tell us why, or perhaps I should say you ought to tell us why you *think* we shouldn't worry about the ladder."

"Good, Willis. Good." Once more Amblethorpe brought his best inspector back to the sunshine. "What's your idea, Fox-Browne?" He shot a half-angry, half-inquisitive look at Charles. "Do you know who it was?"

Charles nodded. "Me."

"What!" The voices of Amblethorpe and Willis were in unison.

"It was me," said Charles. He held up a hand for silence. "Before you decide to jug me, why not hear what I've got to say this afternoon? Sha'n't bolt. Leave a man with me if you like."

Now both Amblethorpe's hands were at his head. "My God! What a business," he muttered at the floor. He raised the face of an aged and much puzzled child to his subordinate. There was in his faded blue eye a look of urgent appeal which said more plainly than any words: "What shall we do? What shall we do?"

Willis rose to the occasion. "If I might suggest, sir, I think we might safely trust Mr. Fox-Browne to call upon us this afternoon. I don't see quite why he can't tell us what he's got to say now, but I suppose that's his affair. . . ." He added more slowly: "He can come over in one of the police cars with Holt."

Charles sat down again upon the edge of the table. He put back his head and laughed. He said:

"Safely trust me, what! . . . Let's make it four o'clock. Where?"

Willis turned to Amblethorpe. "If I might suggest, sir, the station would do as well as anywhere."

Again Charles laughed. His eyes met the eyes of

Willis. In Willis's eyes was a twinkle of amusement, but there was behind the amusement something else.

3

The sun had gone and a chill dusk was blurring the Saxon outline of Deyning Water High Street. A small open car drew up at the new brick building at the corner of High Street and Water Lane.

" 'Ere we are, sir." Holt was officially cheerful. Somehow he got his bulk to the pavement and in a moment was shepherding Charles up the three steps of the Police Station.

He opened a door upon his left and stood aside to let Charles enter. Behind a desk sat a helmetless sergeant in uniform.

" Mr. Fox-Browne," said Holt.

" Oh! Ah!" said the sergeant. He got down from his high stool and opened a door at the far end of the room. " If you'd step along this way, sir."

Charles found himself in a small room barely but comfortably furnished. Behind the table in the window sat Amblethorpe, *affairé*. A bright light in the centre of the room shed most of its rays upon the table, but in the gathering gloom beyond the yellow circle Charles saw the gaunt figure of Willis. In front of the fire, with his back against the mantelpiece, lounged Riley, and it was, as so often with him, Riley who spoke first. He said:

" Arrival of Neil Cream! What you been at, Foxey? You've got S'Roger and all the little constabules quite worked up."

" Really!" Amblethorpe rose tall and dignified from behind his table. " Riley! You asked to come here this afternoon, and in view of your many great services to us

in the past, I consented. I should be much obliged, however, if you would let me conduct . . ."

"Sorry. Sorry." Riley grinned like an angry dog. "Ever so sorry."

He came forward and held out his hand. Charles took it. His left eye, the eye farthest from the Chief Constable, fluttered in a hardly discernible wink. Riley went back to his mantelpiece.

"Sit down, Fox-Browne, sit down!" Amblethorpe's tone showed him the prey of conflicting emotions.

"Thanks," said Charles. He twitched a chair up to the table, pushed his hat beneath it and sat.

There was a pause. A large clock upon the wall made its ticking heard ominously loud.

"Well," said Amblethorpe uncertainly.

"I'm going," said Charles, "to talk."

From the fireplace came the rattling sound of Riley's harsh laughter. "He actually does, sometimes. . . . Oh! Sorry. Sorry."

"You people," said Charles, sitting back in his chair and crossing one leg over the other, "have come to the conclusion that the death of Enid Lester-Greene was not humanly caused. . ."

There came, from the shadows, a cough from Willis.

"Well, I don't know, Fox-Browne . . ." Amblethorpe began.

"Sorry to be rude," said Charles, "but you have. Said so this morning. I've come to the conclusion that it *was* humanly caused. It was a damn clever, but otherwise ordinary, murder. . . ."

"But, man"—Amblethorpe pounded upon his desk—"the thing's impossible, look at it what way you will!"

"Oh! S'Roger." Once more Riley's voice carved its way through the warm, still air of the room. "Give the bloke a chance. Sorry. I will be good."

"Go on, Fox-Browne. Go on." The Chief Constable, with dignity ignoring interruptions, lay back in his swivel chair, one hand shading his eyes from the light, the other playing with the corner of his blotting pad.

"The thing," said Charles, "*appears* impossible. Actually it is possible. Listen: you keep coming up against time, because such a little time elapsed between Pursell's answering the 'phone and my getting into the study. You say it's impossible for the woman to have been murdered because she was definitely drowned. If you start with the theory that she was killed—drowned—between the time of that telephone call and my getting into the study, you're right. But assume that she was killed *before* that telephone call and you're wrong."

Amblethorpe dropped the hand which had been shading his eyes. He stared across the table at his visitor His lower jaw was dropped a little.

Willis came out of the shadows. Forgetful of propriety, he leaned both hands on the edge of the Chief Constable's desk. Unlike his superior's, his mouth was closed in a thin, hard line. When he spoke it was in a voice new even to Riley. He said, staring full at Charles:

"Are you suggesting, Mr. Fox-Browne, that Lord Pursell was lying when he swore to Mrs. Lester-Greene's voice? She had—as I can testify, even having met her only once—a most distinctive voice."

"Pursell," said Charles, "was not speaking the truth. Whether he lied on purpose or by accident . . ." A lifting of the shoulders completed the sentence. "Want me to go on?" He returned Willis's stare.

"In a minute. In a minute," Willis said, a thin sardonic smile twisting his mouth under the grey moustache. "I think you're forgetting, Mr. Fox-Browne, that, according to your own evidence, the telephone bell rang while you were in the office downstairs, not only

once but twice. The first time it was answered by Mr. Sandys and the second time it was answered by Lord Pursell." He leant still farther forward over the table, but now he supported his weight only on one hand. With the forefinger of the other he rapped to emphasise each word. "I think you have also forgotten, Mr. Fox-Browne, that the telephone was a single line telephone from the study. It isn't a bell, it's a buzzer. And it can't, therefore, be confused with the ringing of the main line telephone in the office. I think you've forgotten those things, Mr. Fox-Browne, and I think you've forgotten another thing still, and that is that supposing some person had rung from the study and managed to convince both Mr. Sandys and Lord Pursell that it was Mrs. Lester-Greene who was speaking, this person would have had, after the last telephone call, only *one* minute to escape from the study either by the window, shutting it behind him—which is impossible—or by the door, locking it behind him, which if not an impossible feat in itself is certainly an impossible feat to perform in the time." Willis suddenly seemed to become aware of his own unorthodox behaviour. He straightened, and turned to Amblethorpe. He said: "I'm sorry, sir. I should have left this to you. I'm afraid I got sort of carried away and almost lost my temper. When I think of the time that you and I and the others have spent thinking about this, and then get asked to waste my time and yours listening to some *amateur* theory, I . . ."

"Perfectly all right, Willis. Perfectly all right." Amblethorpe seemed to extract strength from his subordinate. He jerked round in his chair. He said:

"I must say, Fox-Browne, that I agree with every word Inspector Willis has said. I can only regard this interview as a waste of time! . . . Nothing more nor

less than a waste of time! I'm sorry to have to speak like this, but I really do feel . . ."

What were the real feelings of Sir Roger Amblethorpe at this moment will never be known. He was cut short by a peal of laughter from the fireplace; raucous, ear-splitting, crashing laughter, utterly unashamed.

"Honest to God," said Riley, his words still choked by mirth, "I'm sorry, S'Roger. Honest to God, I couldn't help it. You don't know Foxey. I do. The moment he opens his mouth to tell you something, either you or Willis there jumps straight down past his tonsils." His laughter ceased as suddenly as it had begun. He said, in a voice so intense as to seem savage: "For God's sake, as I said before, give him a chance! Keep those traps of yours shut for five minutes and you may hear something. You mayn't agree with it, but I'll bet you ten pounds to all your buttons that at least it'll be sense—and think how refreshing some of that would be in here!"

"I think," said Charles, with a smoothness so unusual in his speech that by the very shock of it he averted the outburst he felt was due against his champion, "that if Inspector Willis would let me go on he might find I'm not quite such a fool as he thinks. Best thing to do is to let me start again." He paused and then, as there came no dissentient voice, went on: "Right! The thing *is* impossible if the telephone calls were made by the woman herself. As (always my point of view, remember!) the thing's *got* to be possible, the calls *can't* have been made by the woman. Therefore they were made by some one else. It's impossible for this person to have got out of the room, leaving it locked, between the time of the call and our arrival at the study. Therefore whoever it was got out of the study door before the call was made and therefore the second call at least was not made from *inside* the study. But it's a single line 'phone.

Therefore the line must have been tapped at some point between its leaving the study and arriving in the office. . . ."

There came a smothered snort from Riley. He had been studying the face not of Amblethorpe but of Willis. The result of his studies had amused him but commendably he restrained himself. Willis's expression, from being one of power-conscious and threatening derision, had become one of gaping astonishment. From his mouth there came a strangled exclamation.

"But my dear fellah!" began Amblethorpe, looking from Charles to Willis and from Willis back again to Charles like a bewildered and elderly ram. "But my dear fellah . . ."

"Listen," said Charles. "That conclusion about the 'phone was my last. I'm telling it first because I've got to make you take notice. It didn't dawn on me fully until last night. As soon as it did I hopped out of bed, dodged your minions, slipped out to the stable yard, pinched a ladder, shoved it up against the ledge just below the study and clomb. Only had a little torch and didn't want to be seen, but I managed. I found that just below where it came out of the study from the usual boring in the sill, the single line cable—it was easy to differentiate it from the main line cables on the other side—had had about three inches of insulation scraped away from it. Go and see for yourself. You won't at first because it's been smeared with pitch, but when you look again you'll find it. Obviously not a professional job. It clinched my theory. . . ."

"Good God above!" said Willis solemnly.

Amblethorpe made sounds but they were not distinguishable. He waved, however, a hand which said more plainly than words: "Go on! Go on!"

Charles went on. "Right! Well, working backwards (according to the way I got at it) we've got this: Some-

body taps 'phone; therefore the time difficulty for the murder is abolished. Riley: You saw the body at 12.30 a.m. and couldn't certify life to have been extinct for less than one or more than four hours?"

"O.K.," said Riley. A wide malicious grin split his heavy round face as he gazed at Amblethorpe and Willis.

"Not less," said Charles slowly, "than one hour: not more than four hours. You're left the possibility of the woman having been killed at any time between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. You're left the certainty that between twenty to ten, when the bridge party left the palm court, and ten o'clock, when the second fake call came through to the office, any one or more members of the household—except me and Sandys and Pursell—could've got into the study, done the job and come out again without being rumbled. . . ."

"Suppose, sir," said Willis suddenly, "you leave the time factor for a moment and get on to the method factor. I'm willing to apologise and admit that in *time* the thing is possible, but I still don't see *how*." His tone, now, was in almost comic contrast to that of a few moments before. "And I can hardly imagine your coming here, sir, and telling us all this if you hadn't got a lot more to say."

"Have," said Charles smiling. "Worse luck! Hate talking. Quickest way would be to tell you first how I think the murderer went about it and then answer questions on points. Any objections? . . . Right! Murderer walks calmly into study. Says: 'Hullo! Sorry to interrupt!' Walks up to Mrs. Lester-Greene. Pulls handkerchief out with the small tube of ammyl nitrite inside it. Says: 'Smell this!' Breaks it, inside handkerchief, under her nose. Willy-nilly victim inhales, gets violent heart acceleration and flops. Not dead, mind you! Just unconscious. Murderer tips water

from bronze urn into large silver ash tray after emptying ash tray on to piece of paper; then shoves victim's face into the three-quarters full bowl and holds it there for say three and a half minutes. When she's dead the body's dragged over to the couch and tidily arranged. Face is dried. Telephone's disconnected. Handbag's then opened and the nail polish spilt to account for the smell of peardrops. . . . Clever touch that! . . . Surplus water's then disposed of. A towel's produced from pocket or bag and the urn is dried carefully and set back on the book-shelf. The ash tray's dried and stubs are put back into it. The paper they've been on is crumpled up and shoved back into the pocket or bag. So's the wet towel. . . . Now, one quick look round the room. Everything all right. Tip-toe to the door. Open it quietly and boldly so as not to attract attention either way. Step out. No one in the palm court. Right! Now for the miracle to fit in with the plan, all of which has been laid on a ghost basis. Door's got to be locked on the inside with key still in the lock. From bag or inner pocket murderer produces very strong waxed silk thread heavily tagged at one end and at the other threaded into an eye at the top of a thin piece of high-tempered steel about the size of a bodkin. Going back into the room again and closing the door, murderer puts the bodkin through the loop in the haft of the key in such a way that when the thread attached is passed under the door and pulled upwards from the outside the bodkin becomes fulcrum and lever to turn the key. Murderer does this, and then goes out and closes the door. He notices alternatively that there's no one in the palm court at all, or that any one in the palm court either doesn't matter or is unable to see him. Bends down—quickly or cautiously—and picks up tag at the end of the thread: pulls slowly and steadily upwards and, by leverage, the bodkin turns the key and

then, as the loop in the haft comes to a vertical position and the door is locked, drops out. Murderer then pulls carefully on the thread until the bodkin is once more with him . . . *Makou!*"

"Eh?" said Amblethorpe in a dazed voice.

"Finis!" said Charles.

Once more forgetful of etiquette, Willis sat heavily upon the corner of the Chief Constable's desk. More, he sat with his back to the Chief Constable. He said, slowly and seeming to pick his words with a care even greater than usual:

"Mr. Fox-Browne! I have got to apologise to you."

"Don't," said Charles. He smiled on the word, a smile whose quality brought to the lean, lined face of Willis a look of gratitude.

Riley came thrusting forward from the hearth. His hand descended with a sounding whack upon Charles's shoulder. He said:

"None so bad, Foxy! None so bad!" His smiling and belligerent but always humorous eye looked first at Willis and then at Amblethorpe. "But, me lad, there's one hell of a lot of questions! . . . Aren't there, S'Roger? Aren't there, Willis?"

Amblethorpe, a dawning light of understanding breaking through the glassy sheep's stare in his eyes, gave a curious movement of his head; half-nod, half-shake.

Willis filled the breach. "I agree with you, Doctor. . . . Now then, Mr. Fox-Browne: The deceased was drowned. There were never even any flowers in the room. Water was not laid on to the room. No water, even drinking water, was ever kept in the room. How did your murderer, in the first place, get water into the room without exciting comment? And how do you know that the water was in one of the bronze urns on the book-shelf?"

Charles smiled. "Easy! Taking your last question

first: When the photographer arrived, and you and the Chief Constable were talking to him, I examined the urns. I wiped out the left-hand one with a clean handkerchief which came out still clean. I wiped out the right-hand one and it came out covered with dust. A woman had been drowned in the room. Inference: Water had been in the clean urn. . . . As to how the murderer introduced water into the room, I have no definite theory. It's enough for me that the woman was drowned. There must have been water in the room. One urn was clean and so the water was probably in that. . . ."

Willis interrupted. "But how would you say, sir, that the murderer introduced the water. What time, too?"

Behind his desk Amblethorpe, the necessity for self-assertion beginning to creep back visibly into him, nodded his head like a handsome owl. "Quite right! Quite right! Very important! What time, Fox-Browne, do you suggest that the . . ."

He was fated to interruption. Once more Riley exploded. "What the hell," he said violently, "does it matter what time or how? The woman was drowned. The water was in the room. The water was in the urn. I tell you, S'Roger—and you, Willis—that if you try to get Fox-Browne to talk on non-essentials, you'll fail. You might even gum him up altogether, and that wouldn't be nice for you, would it? You let him go on. Damn it! If it's worrying you, I could tell you eighty ways of how to get water into a room without being spotted. If it's a man, what's the matter with a couple of hot water bottles, each full, hanging down inside your trousers? They're nice and wide nowadays —trousers I mean. What's the matter with syphons of soda-water carried openly? What's the matter with an attaché case or something lined with zinc? What's the

matter with rubber-lined pockets, if it comes to that? Or, if it wasn't a man, what's the matter with a nice, big, mackintosh-lined handbag? For God's sake let him go on! There are thousands of ways, and what does it matter? You don't seem to realise that this is *interesting*!" He swung round to face Charles directly. "You go on, Foxey!" he said. "Don't mind me. And whatever you do, don't mind them!"

Charles concealed a smile, but he went on. He said, looking at Amblethorpe:

"Riley's right. And he's made an inference which I was going to, later. It might have been a man and it might have been a woman. Keep that in your heads. Don't always, if I use the word 'he,' think that I mean the murderer must be male. There's no *must* about it. . . ." He switched his gaze to Willis. "Next question?"

Willis ceased his angry stare at Riley: a stare which said plainly that if its owner were Chief Constable, no semi-official little layman should come into this room and be allowed to brow-beat, however clever he might have been in the past. Obviously, Willis concealed his wrath. The anger went from his eyes as they met the eyes of Charles. He said:

"Am I right in assuming, Mr. Fox-Browne, that your theory will be best fitted by some one who had definite right of entry to the study at any time?"

Charles looked at him. "Best fitted, yes. But it's not essential."

"Even if it was," said Riley in a new and quieter voice, "it wouldn't narrow your field much. At least I don't see how it would. For a start, you've got practically all the servants, you've got a secretary, a daughter, a brother, a housekeeper and a fairly intimate young friend. . . . Sorry I interrupted."

Charles looked at Willis. "He's right, you know. . . . Next please?"

Willis pulled reflectively at the sparse, grey moustache. He said, after a pause: "When you were talking just now, you said that when the murderer looked out the first time into the palm court after committing the crime, he noticed that there was either no one in the palm court at all, or that if there was some one they couldn't see him, *or that if they did see him it didn't matter.* I'd like to know exactly what you meant by that last, sir? Why shouldn't it matter?"

"If it didn't matter," said Charles slowly, "such person or persons as the murderer saw were accomplices."

"Good God!" said Amblethorpe, power of speech returning in full measure. "Are you trying to tell us that this . . . that this . . . horrible, dastardly business was done by more than one person?"

Charles, his head a little on one side, looked across the table. There was something humorously sorrowful in his gaze. He said: "I'm not *telling* anything. I'm answering questions on a theory. It could have been done by one person or by two or three or more." He looked again at Willis.

"Very well, Mr. Fox-Browne." Willis, for an instant looked half-apologetically but nevertheless with firmness at Amblethorpe. "We'll leave that for the time being. Why are you certain that the water was put into the silver ash tray in order to do the murder?"

Charles looked at him. "Told you that when we were in the room together. The cigarette stubs were there all right, but there wasn't enough ash. Therefore the contents must have been tipped out. As something must have been used for drowning, and this was the right size, it's not going too far to assume definitely that the ash tray was the receptacle. . . . Next please?"

" Please, sir "—Riley's voice was high and squeaking and his right hand was held up above his head—" Please, sir, I want to ask something. . . . Do you place the disconnection of the 'phone in the study as being before or after the first fake call? Obviously it couldn't be after the second. But I'd like to know whether you think the first came from there or not."

" Just now," said Charles, " you leapt at Willis here because he asked an unnecessary question. You're doing it now. Doesn't matter at this stage."

" Does," said Riley glaring. " Makes all the difference—and you know it—whether there was an accomplice or whether there wasn't. At least not all the difference, but a good deal of it."

" It doesn't," said Charles, speaking very slowly, " make the slightest difference now. Later, possibly." He had turned to look fully at Riley and his left eye, for the second time since he had entered this room, flickered in an almost imperceptible wink.

" Oh!" said Riley. " Ah! Yes! Right! Sorry, very sorry!" He relaxed into silence, the beginning of a grin twitching down one corner of his wide, goblin's mouth.

" Mr. Fox-Browne," said Amblethorpe suddenly, with a rush of stentorian pomposity which came close to undoing Riley, " Mr. Fox-Browne! I think that both Inspector Willis and Dr. Riley have omitted to ask you what I consider a very important question indeed. It is this: Are you certain—absolutely certain—that this trick which you describe of locking a door upon the inside is really possible?"

" My dear Holmes!" said Riley, in a mutter mercifully inaudible, " your methods astonish me!"

Charles looked at the Chief Constable " Absolutely certain. To make sure I tried it on the door of my own room last night."

"And it worked?" Amblethorpe was ponderously unnecessary.

Charles bowed. "Yes. And I only used a bodkin, which might have snapped."

"Thank you. Now, Mr. Fox-Browne"—Amblethorpe was, by this time, well into his stride; beginning, indeed, to enjoy himself. "I would like to ask you this also in connection with the lock. I remember as we were all in that ill-fated room together the other night, seeing you turning the key this way and that, locking and unlocking the door. I didn't think to remark upon this at the time, but this further discussion of locks has brought it back most vividly to my mind. Will you tell me whether you had, at that stage of the affair, this idea in your mind?"

Charles lifted his shoulders. "Impossible to say. Sorry. At the beginning of a thing like this I don't think much. Just puzzle about after one thing and the other. Can't be more explicit, I'm afraid. What definitely did occur to me was that the lock was working more smoothly than any lock I had so far come across in the house."

"Meaning, sir," said Willis, "that it struck you as having recently been oiled?"

Charles nodded. "In that connection, I'm going to suggest that if you take any action on this theory of mine one of the first ought to be to have that lock taken off and the oil analysed."

Amblethorpe's faded eyes opened in a wide, blank stare. "What on earth for? I'm afraid you expect too much of our scientific department. The mere fact of oil being in a lock, my dear fellah, wouldn't tell us who had put it in the lock."

Charles repressed a strong desire to sigh. "Naturally. But if the analysis revealed a mixture of different oils in that lock, it might help you. Certainly you would *know* that the lock had not been oiled in the ordinary

course of household business. You might even hear of some one asking for oil. Or stealing oil. Or buying oil. Not very important, but worth the trial."

Amblethorpe bent his brows. "Yes, yes," he said, with a parade of intelligent acquiescence. "Yes, yes. Something in what you say, undoubtedly, there is something in what you say. Yes . . . Willis!"

"Sir," said Willis, coming a step nearer to the desk.

"Any more questions, Willis?" Amblethorpe was handing over in the grand manner.

"One thing," said Willis. "This ammyl nitrite you mentioned, sir. Of course I remember the smell of pear-drops and I remember that it was accounted for by the nail polish, which I suppose had ammyl nitrite in it. What I want to be quite sure of"—here he switched his gaze from Charles to Riley—"is that the inhaling by the deceased of this small quantity of ammyl nitrite which you say the murderer held in a handkerchief, would cause her to become unconscious."

"That," said Riley, "is O.K., Willis. Mind you, I'm not saying that it would have that effect on everybody, but on an elderly, high-blood-pressured, over-well-fed creature like that, it isn't only possible but eminently probable. . . . If that was the way the blighter did do it, it was damn clever! He gets her unconscious without having to make a mark on her."

"That was the way all right," Charles said. . . . "Anything else, Willis?"

But Willis was not yet to make his final question Once more there came to Amblethorpe a thought that, after all, he was the county's Chief Constable. "One moment, Willis," he said, "one moment." His voice was now something between the bewildered, lost tones of the earlier part of the interview and the sudden, self-assertive pomposity of a few moments before. "There's one more question *I* wish to put to Mr. Fox-Browne.

But before I put it I want to ask whether you seriously mean me to believe that this diabolic murder was carried out in the way it was in order to make the world believe that the death of this poor woman was merely a repetition of the mysterious deaths of the Friar's Pardon owners centuries ago?"

"He does," said Riley. "Oh! he does!"

Charles was gentler. "That's what I mean," he said. . . . "What was your question, sir?"

"This," said Amblethorpe. "You know, Fox-Browne"—his voice as well as his manner was once more friendly—"that there have undoubtedly been, during the short time which Mrs. Lester-Greene was at Friar's Pardon, some very funny things happening in the house. Very queer things! Having been in the house yourself, you must have heard something about them; in fact we know you have from what you have told us. Now, my question is this, Do you think—and if you do, have you any reason for thinking—that all these . . . er . . . phenomena were caused by the murderer as a sort of . . . er . . . preparation for his ghastly crime?" He sat back in his chair, blowing a little as a man will blow after running a few more yards than is his custom. He smiled. He felt better. He realised, from the looks upon the faces of the other three men in this room, that he had at last made some contribution to the discussion which did not either irritate or amuse them. He felt that Willis, in particular, was looking at him with a new if somewhat uncivilly surprised respect. His sensations were worth, he felt, the effort he had made with his tired and puzzled brain.

"I do," said Charles.

"You mean," said Amblethorpe, unable to restrain himself from embroidering his success, "that you don't believe any . . . of the . . . er . . . phenomena

which are supposed to have occurred in the house were . . er . . . genuine phenomena?"

Again Charles nodded. "That's right! I don't. They *were* preparation."

"If you know of this, Foxey," Riley broke in, "I suppose you know . . ." He pulled himself up abruptly. He had remembered the second wink.

Willis looked at him with something like suspicion.

"Going to say," said Riley, "if he knew of these, I suppose he could tell us . . ." He paused deliberately, while Willis's head came forward as if fascinated, "how the tricks were done."

"Ach!" said Willis, exasperated into forgetting his manners.

"I am not," said Charles hastily, "going to waste my time or yours. Doesn't matter how they were done. Does matter that they have been done. All easy." He paused a moment, and added half under his breath: "All except one."

No one seemed to hear the last three words except Riley, and Riley looked sharply at their author.

Amblethorpe, still basking in his new-found glory, was looking at Willis and saying:

". . . what did you think Dr. Riley was going to say?"

"I thought, sir," said Willis with deliberation, "that Dr. Riley was going to suggest that Mr. Fox-Browne had, as well as this theory of *how*, a theory of *who*. That Mr. Fox-Browne could tell us who this theory of his would fit in the house. To put it more plainly still, sir, that Mr. Fox-Browne could tell us his definite suspicion as to who was the murderer."

"Eh!" said Amblethorpe, aghast. "Eh!"

"Or murderers," said Charles blandly, and then shook his head. "No, I can't do that. No grounds. You've got a lot of work to do."

"You don't even," said Willis, beginning to pace the

room with his short, jerky stride, "suspect any particular person or persons?"

"Why," said Charles mildly, "should I tell you? Supposing I told you and turned out to be wrong? Made myself a fool and other people uncomfortable. I'm saying nothing—yet."

"One moment," said Amblethorpe, trying fussily to enhance his new-garnered reputation. "One moment. . . . You mentioned, Mr. Fox-Browne, in your very lucid and, if I may be permitted to say so, extraordinarily clear exposition, that the murderer had disposed, after death, of any surplus water. . . . Now, it's just occurred to me that he couldn't have opened the window and thrown the water out, or rather, not that he couldn't have done so, but that so clever a fiend *wouldn't* have done so. . . ."

Willis interrupted. "He didn't do so, sir. Underneath the study there's a projecting ledge which I looked at immediately I entered the room, using a torch. There was no wet on that, neither was there any wet upon the gravel which edges the flags of the great court in front of the house, or upon the flags themselves."

"Exactly, exactly," Amblethorpe nodded violently. "As I said, Willis, this fiend was too clever to have opened the window and thrown out the water." He looked up at Charles with the air of one who has said an unanswerable poser. "How, then, Mr. Fox-Browne, do you deduce that he got rid of the surplus water which he must have had? Surely, surely, he could not have put it upon that log fire?"

Charles shook his head; then frowned reprovingly at Riley, who had choked a snort of laughter.

"You're quite right," said Charles, "he didn't throw it out of the window. He didn't throw it on to the fire. . . ." He paused a moment. "But there's a much easier way than either of these two of doing what

he wanted; a way in which the water could be got rid of without any possibility of any trace being left."

There was silence in the room for a long moment, and then Willis, with a queer sound in his throat, turned suddenly away. And Amblethorpe, brain flogged to activity by his desire for continued intellectual prominence, stared and gobbled. "Almighty God!" he said. "You mean to tell me that the fiend actually . . . Oh! Good God!"

In the background Riley chuckled; a sardonic and disturbing sound.

"Certainly," said Charles. His tone was very mild "Actually, the drowning's worse than the drinking."

For a moment of silence, the other men—Riley included—stared at him. But Willis broke the silence. "I suppose you're right, sir," he said, "not to tell us who you suspect."

"I am," said Charles. "I've told you what I know and I've told you what I think. I might have a dozen *guesses,* but there'd be no point in giving them away. He stood up. He looked first at Amblethorpe and then round at Willis. He said:

"I'll tell you this. I've no *definite* suspicion. If I've got a hunch I'm not going to spill it until I'm sure. Job's up to you now. You get to work—and the things you find out, if they don't put you on to the right people, might put me. And that's *all* I'm saying. Hate talking. Done enough to last me a year." He stooped and from under his chair took up his hat. He walked towards the door. Six eyes followed his movements. He said, fingers on the door handle:

"If you want me, Amblethorpe, I shall be at Friar's Pardon."

The Chief Constable opened his mouth as if to speak. but shut it again as the door shut behind the man to whom he would have spoken.

CHAPTER XIII

WOLF'S CLOTHING

I

CHARLES and Sandys faced each other across the breakfast table. The morning was not misty in the manner of its predecessors. Outside, hard yellow sunshine flooded the whole of Westerdown. Its reflected light showed both men's faces pinched and drawn, like the faces of men who, if they have slept at all, have slept ill.

Charles, endeavouring to make up for sleeplessness, ate stolidly far more than he wanted. Sandys smoked cigarette after cigarette and drank black coffee out of a breakfast cup.

The service door opened and Seton came. He wore his normal expression of a reticent vulture and his walk was his normal, cat-footed, man-servant's walk. But in his face there were lines which had not been there three days before and his eyes seemed far back in his head, and beneath them his cheeks were of a startling pallor. He carried, upon a small silver tray, a folded roll of the morning's papers. Without a word he set them down by Sandys and vanished as softly as he had come.

"Good!" said Sandys, in the tone of a man who welcomes any distraction from thought. He crunched out the stub of his sixth cigarette in the saucer of his cup. He unrolled the bundle of papers and flipped open one of them and was lost behind it to Charles's view.

Charles, having rested and drunk coffee, reached out for toast and marmalade.

"God damn and blast the bloody swine!" Sandys

was on his feet, the newspaper crumpled into a distorted, shapeless thing, beneath his fingers.

"God damn and blast the bloody swine!" he said again.

Charles set down the marmalade.

Sandys, leaning with his left hand upon the edge of the table, bent over and thrust the newspaper, with a hand which trembled, under Charles's eyes. Distorted by the crumpling, headlines, jagged and aborted, stared out at Charles:

"IS GLADYS LESTER-GREENE IN DANGER?"
"SAFEST COURSE TO MOVE HER"
"SHOULD THE INEXPLICABLE BE DEFIED?"

"Umph!" grunted Charles. "Wondered when they'd start that." He lifted the lid of the marmalade jar and helped himself with liberality.

Sandys straightened. The newspaper, fallen from his hand, lay an untidy black-and-white heap upon the carpet. He said:

"God damn and blast the bloody swine!"

"Heard you the first time," said Charles with his mouth full.

"What?" Sandys stared.

"What's it matter?" said Charles.

Sandys sat down heavily. "Perhaps it doesn't, after all. I was only thinking Gladeyes will surely want to see the papers. She did yesterday. And that"—he kicked the offending paper—"that won't do her any good."

Charles raised an eyebrow. "Why not move her? Might be a good thing."

Sandys jerked impatiently in his chair. "Talk sense, for God's sake! Yesterday and the day before Maudie suggested it; so did I; so did that blasted maid of hers.

going. I don't know what time you got up, but I've been about since a quarter to eight and this is the fourth bloody business that's turned up already. Why the Hell I ever took on a job like this I don't know. I always hated it while E. L.-G. was alive, and I hate it a damn sight worse now she's dead. . . . Sorry, don't take any notice of me."

Charles lit a cigarette. "Don't worry! What were the other crabs this morning?"

"First, if you please"—Sandys voice was quivering with the repression which he was putting upon himself —"came a young man; *ever* such a nice young man from *The Courier*. Could he see Miss Lester-Greene? No, he could not. Was he speaking to Mr. Norman Sandys, poor Mrs. Lester-Greene's secretary? He was. Could he possibly have some story for his paper; some intimate accounts of the different members of the household? . . . I wasn't long with *him*! He went out of the door a damn sight quicker than he came in by it. That was one. Number two annoyance was a state visit from Seton. Master Seton, if you please, feels that association

with such a house as Friar's Pardon will do him no good when his time comes to get another job. Master Seton, if you please, would be very glad if Mr. Sandys could be so obliging as to represent Master Seton's predicament to the police and induce them to let Master Seton leave the house without delay. Master Seton would—blast his eyes!—be only too glad to inform the police of all his movements as long as get away he could. Well, I sent him packing too. Told him that if he wanted to ask any bloody favours of the bloody police to bloody well go and ask the bloody favours for his bloody self. That was number two. . . . Number three was another journalist. A fat, greasy, oily-looking thing from *The Clarion*. Got rid of him quicker than I did the first. My temper was getting short by that time. And now, on top of all this, comes *this*!" He got up from his chair and pounced upon the paper like an angry cat. He crunched it up into a ball, threw it into the fire, and kicked it into the glowing logs with a vicious disregard for shoe-leather. "Do you know what's going to happen next, Fox-Browne," he said, coming back to the table, "because if you don't, I'll tell you. After breakfast, in any time I get alone from running up and down stairs to Gladeyes, who seems to think I'm a sort of combination of Merlin and the District Messenger Force . . . in any time I *do* get to myself, I'm going to be besieged by servants' complaints. They'll all want to go. Seton told me as much this morning. There seems to have been some fresh manifestation of the poltergeist or whatever they call it. I wish he'd come up or down and burn the whole damned house and everything. I'm fed up. . . . What the Hell's that?"

There had come, penetrating his voice, high-pitched with the strain upon his nerves, a sudden knocking and the pealing, somewhere in the recesses behind the dining-room, of the main door bell. They waited in silence,

and presently, this time through the double-leaf doors opening to the hall, Seton came to them. He said, looking at Sandys: " Excuse me, sir. Inspector Willis is outside. He would like a word with you, sir."

Sandys nodded. " Tell him I'll come at once," he said, and turned to Charles. His pale face was twisted by a smile. " If there's any more trouble this morning, I shall be very grateful if you would blow out my brains." He walked to the big doors and the right-hand leaf slammed behind him.

Charles poured himself a fresh cup of coffee, lit another cigarette and, taking *The Morning Post* from the remainder of the pile by Sandys's place, settled himself comfortably enough.

He had been reading for perhaps five minutes when Sandys came back.

" I say," said Sandys, on a low pitched note of wonder, " I say!"

Charles put down the paper.

Sandys jerked his head at the doors behind him. " Willis is out there," he said, still speaking very low. " He's got a couple of men with him. . . . They're coming to search the house. You know, sort of top to bottom, cellar to roof, dirty-linen-basket to cistern sort of search. I asked him what the devil for, but he wouldn't tell me. Very close he was. Damn close! I say, Fox-Browne, what do you think's on now?" A rising excitement raised his voice.

Charles looked at him But before he could reply the big doors opened again. This time it was Maud Vassar who came through them. Charles, rising, looked at Sandys with an almost imperceptible shake of his head.

2

Charles swung his right leg over the brown mare's

neck and slid to the ground. Robarts, smiling a toothless smile, took the reins.

" 'Ow did you find 'er, sir?" he said.

" Not so bad," said Charles. " Bit stiffish in all her paces. That's age. Been a real good sort in her time." He slipped half-a-crown into a ready but unobtrusive hand and made quick way back to the house. For the first few yards he was smiling. The thought amused him that perhaps Mr. Robarts would not be quite so ready with his toothless smiles if he knew what it was that had come down the ladder two nights ago. But the smile soon faded, to be replaced by a frown of anxiety. His stride lengthened and quickened until it became nearly a run. Being alone, he allowed himself the fast pace and the frown. Had he been in company, he would have allowed himself neither, for like most men—even of his experienced and self-controlled kind—he was morbidly sensitive concerning exhibition of his own emotions. And the pace and the frown were directly emotional in that they were caused by a desire—a hungry, aching, gnawing wish—to see, and if possible speak with, a certain woman. After breakfast he had hung about the house in vain endeavour to waylay Lesley, but all his stealth and guile and patience had been wasted. At half-past twelve, he had overheard Gautier giving an order to Cleopatra—an order that Mrs. Destrier's luncheon should be taken to her room as Mrs. Destrier was not intending to make public appearance until the afternoon because Mrs. Destrier had the worst of atrocious headaches. . . .

He had been passing the doors of the palm court when he heard this. Suddenly the thought of a meal in this house with all the pale-faced, nerve-shattered oddities forming the household sitting at the same table with him, had given him a sensation of physical nausea. He had

run down the stairs to come face to face with the very man whom he wanted to see. He had said:

" I'm going out. Any objection? Back at tea-time."

Willis had stared at him for a moment, to reply: " No objection at all, sir. . . . I'd like to tell you that we've just . . ."

But Charles had been no longer with him. Charles had been racing up the stairs towards his new room, for there were riding clothes and in the stables was at least something upon four legs. . . .

Now, as he neared the house, his pace slackened. With effort, he smoothed the frown from between his eyes. His walk became a saunter, fitting to a tired and unharassed man who has just taken pleasant exercise. He was about to walk round the house, past the end of the west wing, and enter through one of the doors there, when he saw that the great main door stood open a little way. Turning upon his heel, he ran up the steps between the pillars of the portico. . . .

He is not likely ever to forget the tableau which was presented to his astonished eye.

In the centre of the hall, as if set there by a producer who had gone away to his lunch and instructed his actors not to move upon pain of dismissal, was a group of five persons; two of them central, the other three disposed about them in a dramatic half-circle. The two in the centre were Willis and Lesley Destrier. And the right hand of Willis was upon the left shoulder of Lesley. And in Willis's left hand was a paper from which he appeared to be reading.

The semi-circle was formed of Sandys in the centre, his mouth agape and his dark-shadowed eyes wide with a sort of blazing astonishment. Upon his right was the stolid Holt, looking—as he always would look, whether he were at wedding or execution or on point duty—completely ox-like. And upon the other side of Sandys

was another and strange policeman, not ox-like this young one, but tense and pale.

Charles stood still. As he watched, the group relaxed its statuesque setting and poise. It melted and broke and there walked towards him Lesley and Willis. Behind them, pacing like stupid sentinels of a tragically ridiculous doom, came the two policemen. Only Sandys stood where he had been. Still he stared and still he gaped.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CONVERT

INSPECTOR ARCHIBALD WILLIS sat behind the desk in that inner room in the Police Station where, twenty-four hours before, had sat Sir Roger Amblethorpe. To him there entered a constable. "Well?" snapped Willis.

The constable—he was a young constable—shifted his weight from his left foot to his right. He said, stammering a little: "Surr, there do be a man."

Willis looked at him coldly. "Astonishing," he said. "What man and why?"

The blush grew deeper. "Gennelmun, surr. Do say his name's Fox-Browne. He be askin' . . ."

But Willis did not wait for the end of the halting speech. He frowned and squared his shoulders like a man preparing to face trouble which he has anticipated. "Show him in," he said. "Quick."

The constable vanished, to return a moment or so later and hold open the door for the entrance of some one whom, at first sight, had he not previously heard his name, Willis would very likely not have recognised; some one who, although he wore the same clothes and a face of the same cast and walked with the same walk, was yet a very different person from the Mr. Charles

Fox-Browne whom Willis had hitherto seen. This man, who now in four strides was across the room, soft hat pulled down over his eyes and a blue fire blazing out from beneath the hat brim, was some one different; was a force—and a very vital force—with which Inspector Willis, despite his premonitory discomfort, had not reckoned to have to deal.

"What the hell are you playing at?" said the newcomer. "Pack of fools!"

A tinge of colour mounted to Willis's parchment-like cheeks. He said, not without dignity: "I hardly think, sir, that you'll get anywhere by using that tone."

"Only place," said the new Mr. Fox-Browne with a quiet and appalling intensity, "that I want to get at the moment is out of here before I do you any physical damage. But I can't go until I've heard what you're at. . . . Look here, Willis, you owe me something. If it hadn't been for me and what I came here to say yesterday, you wouldn't have done this damn fool thing! That right?"

Willis—and it is a credit to him—nodded his grey and badger-like head. "In a way, sir," he said slowly, "you are correct."

"I'm correct enough," said Charles in a voice which had a steel edge to it. "Now, what's it all about?" With a sudden movement he put up a hand and plucked the hat from his head and sent it skimming through the air to land upon a chair at the side of the fireplace. With his right foot he hooked a chair towards him and dropped into it.

Willis sat too. He interlaced the fingers of his hands and set them down before him in the manner of a priest. He said, after a pause:

"I must take leave to tell you, Mr. Fox-Browne, that I don't like either your tone or your manner. But I do recognise that we owe you a very great deal, and it's

because we do owe you this that I'm going to tell you what you want to know. It is, I presume, exactly why we arrested Mrs. Conway Destrier for the murder of Mrs. Lester-Greene?"

Charles cut in. "For God's sake hurry!" He did not open his teeth as he spoke.

Willis moved the hands which rested upon the table before he spoke. He said: "Following our conversation here almost twenty-four hours ago, Mr. Fox-Browne, I took, at Sir Roger's instructions, two men to the house this morning. We searched the house methodically from attic to cellar. We found, for the first hour or so of our search, absolutely nothing for which we were looking. But when we resumed our search, after a short rest, just after noon, we found hidden upon a ledge just inside the open fireplace in the room now occupied by Mrs. Destrier, the following articles, wrapped in an untidy, but otherwise workmanlike parcel of brown paper: First, were two small face towels, not belonging to the house, which were still damp and bore traces of dust, such as tobacco ash, fluff, etc. Second, we found a length of flex cable and a field-telephonist's ear phones. Third, we found a small squeeze-drop oil-can filled with vegetable oil. Fourth, we found a tube of rubber solution. And fifth, we found a piece of white quarto paper crumpled up, in which was still a considerable quantity of cigarette ash."

Charles shifted in his seat as if he were about to rise. But he did not. He said: "That room is my room. I only changed with Mrs. Destrier on the night of the murder because she was frightened to sleep in the east wing. What about that?"

Willis shook his head. His badger-like eyes were kindly and troubled and adamant. "Not a bit of good, sir, and you know it. They were up that chimney when we found them and probably—if they hadn't been in

some trunk—they were up another before the move."

"But Mrs. Destrier," said Charles, biting each word off as if it were a personal offence not only to the man he was addressing but to himself, "didn't move anything except her night-clothes."

"Not, sir," said Willis, with a notable mildness, "upon the night when you actually changed. But you can't sit there and tell me that you remained in your new room for the whole of the following day and the next. You can't seriously try to tell me that there's been no occasion when Mrs. Destrier could move this incriminating parcel. . . . Of course you can't, sir! I am very sorry, seeing that you've been of such enormous assistance to us, that we have been forced to take any steps which may be distasteful . . ."

"Cut that out!" said Charles.

Willis went on, as imperturbable now as the power which it was obvious he felt himself to represent. "Further, sir, we have, as I should like to remind you, the following backing to the circumstantial evidence provided by these incriminating objects. We have, first, an undoubted motive in that Mrs. Destrier was known to have quarrelled with the deceased upon the day before the murder and to have wanted a capital sum which the deceased was not prepared to provide her with but which—we have no doubt—she was aware the deceased's will would provide. We have also gained the knowledge—and this may be new to you, sir—that Mrs. Destrier was, only a few years ago, an amateur actress of such notable skill in impersonation that, not once but many times, she was invited to become a member of the theatrical profession. We have also another point which I feel will clinch matters to even your, if I may say so, prejudiced mind. You will remember my showing you the finger-prints on one of the bronze urns in the study; the urn which, as you subsequently proved to all

of us, was probably that in which the murderer concealed the water which was to be the implement of his crime. Well, these prints, sir, were undoubtedly made by the thumb and first two fingers of Mrs. Destrier. I didn't mention it to you yesterday. Doubtless I should if you'd stayed with us a bit longer and not left so abruptly. One of the jobs we did on the first day of our inquiry was to obtain, as a matter of routine, the finger-prints of all the members of the household, with the exception of yourself. This morning, before we began our search, we had an expert down to compare these prints found upon the urn. . . ."

"And you think," said Charles, still without opening his teeth which showed now very white against the grey pallor of his face, "you think that this ingenious devil that did this ingenious thing would be fool enough to leave those prints? One lot only in all that room!"

Again Willis shook his head. He was almost paternal. "I'm sorry, sir. We can't go in, at this stage, for subtlety. We've circumstantial evidence in the parcel. We've motive, provable in a hundred ways. We've the theatrical training to account for the imitation of the deceased's characteristic voice over the telephone. We've the fact—and this is very important—that Mrs. Destrier was the only member of the household to appear immediately upon the scene so soon as you and Lord Pursell and Mr. Sandys reached the study door and began to try to enter. And we have only her own word that she remained in her room, after the break in the bridge party, for the time which she said. . . . I'm sorry, sir, if you think that we've done anything which . . ."

Charles interrupted. He rose to his feet. His chair fell behind him with a crash upon the floor. He said:

"Cut that out! . . . Tell me this instead! You

found ear-phones, you say? What about the rest of the apparatus? What about the microphone?"

Willis shook his head. "No, sir. . . . But I'm afraid we can't let that destroy what obviously is a clear case—thanks to you."

Charles's pallor suddenly intensified. Despite the tan, his face was now ghastly white. "Damn you!" he said. "Shut up!"

Willis rose to his feet, slowly and not without dignity. He said, after a pause:

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Did you have a warrant?" said Charles desperately.

"Yes, sir. Fortunately I went to the house this morning armed with a blank warrant. Not that we expected to use it."

Charles turned on his heel, crossed the room and picked his hat from the chair on to which he had thrown it. He came back. He said, in a very low voice:

"Has she . . . sent for any one?"

Willis shook his head. "To my knowledge, not yet, sir."

"I'm going to see her," said Charles. "Any objection?"

Willis pondered.

"You can't have," said Charles. "Anyhow, you owe me that."

"If you would wait here, sir," said Willis, and was gone from the room.

Charles, standing before the small fireplace, crumpled his hat in his hands and waited.

2

The door shut with a sound loud and metallic. She stood to face Charles. In this square, smooth-walled box, he saw for the first time how small a woman she

was. It was not cold in the box, but he saw that despite the straightness of her and the proud carriage of the gleaming head, she was shaking with a constant though magnificently repressed tremulation.

She had smiled as he entered, but he saw now that the smile did not fade. It was a rigid and fixed stricture of her mouth. She said, speaking, as it were, through the smile:

"This is very nice of you."

Behind his back, as he stood looking down at her, Charles's hands tortured the soft felt of his hat. He said, in a pleasant matter-of-fact voice which cost him tremendous effort:

"I don't agree. Consider: It's my fault that you're here at all."

Her eyes widened slowly. Their indescribable colour changed, darkening with the shadow of some foreboding too frightful for contemplation.

"I think . . . I think . . . I'll sit down." Her voice was flat and toneless and sounded not like her voice at all but like a mechanical reproduction of it. She turned and took two small fumbling steps and dropped on to the edge of her narrow pallet. She sat upright—too upright. There was a convulsive movement of her white throat. She said:

"What did you come for?"

"*Please!*" said Charles. He found difficulty in shaping the word. His tongue seemed suddenly parched and swollen.

She stood up. The movement was sudden and its energy so violent a contrast to her weakness of a moment before as to make the man's heart—foolishly, he told himself—miss its beat in fear. Actually, she stamped a small foot upon the floor, and her voice was again a different voice, for now it was hard and resonant and

more than self-assured by reason of its owner's anger. She said:

"I suppose I must believe what you say. I should be glad if you'd go. . . . *Now!*"

"*Please!*" said Charles again. Behind him, with a soft and ludicrous *plop*, the distorted hat fell to the floor. He took a pace forward and then another. He stood very close to her. The fragrance of some faint and subtle scent, cleanly sweet, came up to him. He said:

"You must let me explain. You *must*!" The last word was command rather than plea.

As suddenly as she had risen she sat. It was as if, with the dawning of a doubt as to the justice of her anger, the strength induced by that anger had ebbed instantly from her small and perfect body.

Charles advanced by another half-step. He thrust his hands into his pockets to conceal their trembling. He said:

"Never jump to conclusions!" The words came, for him, very slowly. His grey eyes seemed to force those other eyes—which were not blue and which were not green—to keep their gaze upon his.

"You can't tell me," he said, "that *you* think that *I* think you did *that*!" As he finished speaking, almost before the last word of his speech was out of his mouth, he smiled. And with the smile, which was a smile which he had never, despite experience in emotion, smiled before, the colour came rushing back to stain his pallor.

The gaze of the other eyes wavered and broke: white, blue-veined lids hid their beauty.

"Oh . . . don't!" she said. And, yet again, the voice was a voice which Charles had not heard before.

The pallet bed was very close to the cold grey floor. He dropped to his knees, conscious of the action only as a means to bring him close to her. He said:

"My God! . . . Listen. Listen, I tell you. . . . Give me your hands."

His own hands came out and clasped their fingers about the small white wrists. He pulled, with a steady gentle pressure only for a moment resisted, her hands from her face.

She raised her head. A strand of glistening hair—the first disorder he had seen in it—lay like a caress from Olympus down one side of her forehead and circled its end upon her cheek. The eyes met his, and in them was something—veiled yet and hardly so much even as a promise of what lay behind it—which made him catch his breath. Her lips moved and small and beautiful sounds came from them.

He bent his head. His fingers still encircled the wrists whose frailness seemed to him at once infinitely strong and infinitely pathetic in their weakness. He raised the white hands to his lips, each hand in turn. And then he released the wrists.

He stood, with a lithe, easy twist of his body. He said, speaking in a tone whose forced normality did nothing to deceive even himself:

"You're not to worry; not to be frightened. Understand? I showed those fools part of something they couldn't see for themselves. Now I'm going—to think out some way of making 'em see the rest. And when I've done *that*, I'll make 'em sweat blood for *this*. . . . And I'll see to other arrangements for you. Food; books. But you won't be *here* long."

Once more he saw the lids veil the eyes which so moved him. But only for an instant. At once they were raised again, and now he saw in the eyes that which made the world stand still for a second or a century and then restart with a convulsion.

"If I don't go," he said, in a voice sounding foreign to his own ears, "I shall stay."

The door closed behind him with a sound loud and metallic.

CHAPTER XV

VOICE OF THE LIONESS

THE dining room of Friar's Pardon—in other times it would have been called hall because of its size—presented, at half-past nine upon the night of Wednesday the 15th November, an aspect altogether foreign to its nature. The table, extended by all its extra leaves, left only half the usual distance between its ends and the eastern and western walls of the room. It had sitting equidistant about it every one of the present inhabitants of the house, from Gladys Lester-Greene—a sallow, twitching, haunted ghost of herself—to the scared and discomfortable and sweating boot-boy.

The inhabitants of Friar's Pardon occupied fifteen out of the sixteen chairs which, with one at the head and one at the foot and seven upon either side, surrounded the table. At the foot of the table, in what was, upon ordinary occasions, the chair of Claude Lester, sat the frail and yet imposing uprightness of Maud Vassar. Upon her right, reaching up in this order to the head of the table, were the boy Frederick Rogers; the Cleopatra-like Gertrude Fenner; the impassive, white-faced Nancy Oakes; the asthmatic and perpetually indignant-seeming Mrs. Clough, for once awed by an occasion; the vulturian immobility of Seton, and then the dapper, gentlemanly nervousness of Norman Sandys, with, next him in the last seat upon this side of the table, Gladys Lester-Greene. Upon Maud Vassar's left were, in this order, the trembling, nervously twitching fluffiness of Agnes Hicks; the stolid, bovine Elsie Bolton; the insouciance, albeit white-faced, of Thérèse Gautier; the black-clad figure of Mrs. Barrett, erect with a fanatical

indignation; Claude Lester, sullen and sallow; Pursell, inclined to let nerves find outlet in girlish, ill-suppressed giggling; and, lastly, to face Gladys Lester-Greene, a Charles Fox-Browne whose hollow cheeks and dark-rimmed eyes, greyish pallor and drooping eyelids seemed to make of him a person whom none of those present had yet seen.

At the head of the table, seated in the chair which had not been used since the death of its owner, was a man who did not belong, either as guest or inmate, to this galley. He was a short and very thick man clad in dark and ill-fitting but otherwise nondescript clothes. His head was covered with a short-clipped and fuzzy bush of wiry black hair. His forehead was a white bulge above dark eyes which gleamed unceasingly and sent, from behind gigantic horn-rimmed spectacles, darting and inquisitive glances all about him with every breath that he drew. But little of his face could be seen by reason of a black beard whose short and curling bushiness differed only from the hair of his head in its surpassing gloss. From out of the black jungle there peered a face astonishing by its pallor. All the man's movements were jerky and restless. He could not sit still. His hands, white and unceasingly in movement, fluttered about his face like strange, giant insects. They felt at the black beard. They plucked at the loose, full lips. They ran their fingers this way and that through the short bushy hair upon the scalp.

There was little light in the chamber. The vast chandelier which hung six feet above the centre of the long table was, to-night, dull glass. The only illumination came from the four wall lamps upon the southern wall. There were many shadows and many tricks of shadow. And there was, as in all big rooms which are only dimly lit, a sensation for the more imaginative of the inhabitants that this room was not the room to which

they were accustomed, but some other place having certain points of resemblance to the room which they knew, but occupying a far greater, perhaps an illimitable, space.

There was, for a few moments after the last person of this incongruous gathering had sat, a gradual diminuendo of sound. Chairs creaked, silks rustled, nervous coughs were strangled, fingers tapped upon the polished oak and then withdrew themselves abashed. These sounds ceased. Upon the wall over the hearth the big clock ticked loud and slow. Below it, upon the hearth itself, a log, burnt through, let its two halves fall with a crackling hiss. To a sudden gust of inexplicable wind, one of the leaded windows rattled sharply and then was silent.

Without a sound, but yet with some other appeal to the company's senses which brought at once all their eyes to bear upon her, there rose Maud Vassar. She stood tall and unreal with half of her bathed in soft light and the other half in deep shadow. She rested the tips of her overlong and transparent fingers upon the table before her. She looked, her strange eyes fully open, first down the table at the stranger at its other end, then, with a slow and deliberate turning of her head, round and about the company. Her glance rested for an equal distance of time upon each of the fourteen faces in turn. She said at last, speaking in a voice from which all traces of her habitual irony were gone:

"There are some of you here who do not quite know, I think, why you are here." She looked around as she spoke, her glance this time stopping short at the last servant, Agnes Hicks, on the left side of the table, and at Frederick Rogers upon the right side of the table.

"I will tell you now," she said, "why we have asked you to come here. Opposite me is Herr Christian Stürm. For the benefit of those of you who do not know—

because you are not interested or have not been until now—Herr Stürm is the most famous spiritist in the world. He has come down here "—her eyes and manner made it plain that she was talking to the servants—" at the request of your mistress, and through the good offices of Mr. Fox-Browne, because, yesterday, Mrs. Destrier, whom you all know and whom, I should imagine, the great majority if not all of you have an affection for, was arrested by the police on suspicion of having caused the death of your late employer."

She paused, and there came for an instant an indefinable sound. It was as if, by the very mention of the dead woman, nerves keyed high already had been strained by the twist of a screw to a tension well-nigh unbearable. Erect as a boy, dignified as the unostentatious aristocrat that she was, Maud Vassar waited, the heavy white lids momentarily veiling her eyes, until there came again complete silence.

" All of you," she said, " must, I imagine, know by this time that Mr. Fox-Browne—who is experienced in matters of this kind—has been assisting the police. The day before yesterday Mr. Fox-Browne went to the police and told them of certain conclusions which he had drawn regarding the possibility of the death of your late employer having been caused by some human . . . some living being within this house. The next day—yesterday—the police, having made certain investigations inside this house, arrested Mrs. Destrier. Circumstantially, the evidence against Mrs. Destrier is doubtless very great. But Mr. Fox-Browne was convinced—as, indeed, I am myself—that to imagine Mrs. Destrier capable of such a deed as the murder of any one, much less Mrs. Lester-Greene, was fantastically ridiculous. But however ridiculous the charge might be, he realised that Mrs. Destrier was in a position of the gravest and most terrible danger. Our law in England is a hide-

bound and old-fashioned and creaking machine rotten with all the bad qualities of age. It will not—you must feel this, I am certain—admit even the possibility of forces other than the visible forces of life as we know it. It will not, in other words, recognise anything . . . how shall I put it to you? . . . it will not recognise anything *spiritualistic*. It will not recognise, that is, that there can possibly be any occult forces; anything outside life as we know it, which can perform deeds apparently possible only to living men and women. . . . Now, all you who are here have lived in this house for at least fourteen days and fourteen nights and the majority of you have seen or heard or experienced in some way something which you cannot understand or find an explanation for in the ordinary course of human events. . . . Is that so or is it not?"

She paused, her grey head, proudly reared, turned as she glanced from one to another of the servants.

There came, after a pregnant silence, an embarrassed murmur of affirmation. Only Mrs. Barratt upon the left-hand side of the table, and Gertrude Fenner upon the right, neither turned their heads towards the speaker nor opened their lips.

"Thank you," said Maud Vassar. "You will then —most of you anyhow—not be astonished when I tell you that Miss Lester-Greene, myself, Mr. Fox-Browne, Lord Pursell and Mr. Sandys have decided, upon our own initiative, to see whether, through the wonderful powers of Herr Stürm, we can get into touch with the astral self of your late mistress. . . . That is to say, whether we can get some communication from the Other Side. You all know, I think, of my interest and passionate belief in spiritism. In fairness, however, both to you and to him, I should tell you that the prime mover in this evening's attempt to put straight the errors of unthinking men by the use of forces available to

thinking men, was Mr. Fox-Browne himself. Until yesterday, when he saw what fools men in the shape of policemen could make of themselves by taking things at their face value, Mr. Fox-Browne did not believe in any form of spiritism whatsoever. The arrest of Mrs. Destrier, however, made him realise, he says, that something abnormal would have to be done to correct the mistakes of normality. He therefore—very wisely and, as I think you will agree, very generously for a man of his previous opinions—suggested to me that through a friend of his in London he could, he felt sure, obtain the services of Herr Stürm. It is probable that all of you who read the papers will know of Herr Stürm by name, especially as since his arrival in England last week there has been a great deal written about him. For the benefit, however, of those of you who may not have read or heard of Herr Stürm and his work and reputation, I feel that I should tell you that he is the one spiritualistic medium for whom even the most antagonistic of the unbelievers have the most profound respect—perhaps even fear."

For a moment the thin ghost of a smile appeared upon the old lady's face as she looked across, with something of awe and a rather incongruous respect in her glance, at the fidgeting man at the head of the table. She paused and he made guttural sounds in his throat and fell to plucking more violently than ever at his loose and shining lower lip.

"I don't think," she said, "that I can usefully say any more to all of you except that as you love truth and justice you should approach this experiment of ours with the most reverent and unbiased minds. Herr Stürm, as soon as I have concluded, will tell you what few preliminaries it is necessary we should go through, if any, before he can attain his trance state. He will not, I

believe, require that there should be any less light than there is at present or any change of positions. . . ."

"No, no," said a broad and Germanic voice from behind the curling beard. "Id is nod necessary, that."

Maud Vassar smiled at him with a slight and almost reverent inclination of her grey head. She said, looking for the last time round at the horseshoe of her listeners. "There is nothing more, then. I hope that you have understood. But please, whether you have understood or not, do your best to help. You can help by concentrating upon the thought of your dead mistress."

She sat down. Her arms, in a characteristic gesture, alighted slowly upon each arm of the high-backed chair, their long fingers caressing the ends of these arms. Over her eyes the white, blue-veined lids dropped again.

The hands of the clock upon the wall stood at two minutes to ten o'clock.

2

The hands of the clock upon the wall stood at thirty-three minutes after ten. Now light came from only two of the wall lamps. The room was a study in shadows. There was complete silence—a silence which made itself felt in the minds of those about the long table like a very definite but untraceable pain. At the head of the table Stürm lay huddled in his chair—a figure which seemed to have shrunk. His big round head lolled so that the chain beneath the black beard was supported on his chest. His arms hung limp over the chair arms. His head, every now and then, moved slightly with a curious half-automatic movement. When it moved and the peach-coloured rays of the nearer wall-light touched his face, the watchers could see beads of sweat upon the white bulge of his forehead.

Some one, somewhere upon Maud Vassar's right,

shifted so that a chair creaked and there was a shuffling of leather upon the thick pile of the carpet.

The silence went on. It had continued now for fifteen minutes. Nerves were stretched, in some cases almost to breaking point; stretched by this utter silence which had come atop of so much and such different talking from the mouth but not the self, it seemed, of the lolling man who sat where Enid Lester-Greene had been used to sit. There had come from his mouth, in all, three voices; and each voice was as different from the others as it was from the voice in which the real man had spoken. . . . And once, to check with sudden and terrifying abruptness within themselves any tendency which the lighter-minded might have felt to laughter. there had come, bursting through the nasality of a flood of seemingly American speech which they had not under stood and which had seemed to bear no relation whatsoever to the purpose for which they were there, five words whose tone, despite a certain thickness and blurredness, was almost the voice which they knew to be that of the dead woman. And the five words had been, yet more than the voice, an indication—even to the most sceptical—that perhaps, after all, there was such a thing as communication unfettered by the actualities of living and breathing. The American voice had been talking. It had been saying: ". . . Say! I cann't translate my thoughts into worrds, but I jest naturally have to do my mediocre best to tell folks on Your Side of some of the ecstatic . . ." And then there had come, *blowing* away, as it were, this nasal inanity as a gust of wind will blow thistledown, the straining, blurred cry; the five words which these listeners had so often heard in the voice of the dead woman. This cry had said, without preamble and without conclusion:

". . . I feel it my duty . . ."

And then it had gone again and there had come once more a flood of the American voice.

Very low, Maud Vassar had said, her words dropping cold into the shadowed silence:

"Who are you? Who are you?"

The nasal voice coming from the round and lolling black-haired head had grown angry. It had spat out a sing-song curse which might, in any other circumstances, have been ludicrous. And then, as abruptly as it had come, it had gone and the silence had started. . . .

The black head of Stürm jerked suddenly and a spasm seemed to shake the whole of his short, thick body. The mouth beneath the black hair opened and there came from the lips a low and crescendo moaning. And then, uterly without warning, came *the* voice again. Its words seemed to tear themselves out of the very heart of the man so that all the time he was speaking his squat body jerked and vibrated. Now, his head, instead of lolling forward, was right back, the curling ends of the beard pointing towards the shadows of the lofty ceiling. It was as if the words were propelled by some terrific force out of his body to explode into the still, close air like small, uncanny shells.

"Who is there?" said the voice. "Who is there? . . . It is difficult for me. It hurts. I feel that I can't . . but I must. I feel it my duty. Oh, please tell me, please tell me who is there!"

Maud Vassar, thin hands clutching the hands of the chair arms until her knuckles stood out lividwhite against the ordinary paleness of the surrounding skin, half rose from her chair. Her eyes were wider open than any one in this room had ever seen them. She stared down the long length of the shadowy bulk of the table at the strange, jerking, uncouth figure at its other end. She said, in a voice which was tremulous with eagerness and hushed with awe:

"I am here. Maud Vassar. You are Enid? You know me?"

From the throat of Stürm came once more the crescendo moaning. Maud Vassar, with weary resignation, cruel disappointment written upon every line of her body, sank back into her chair. But the moaning ceased as abruptly as it had begun and the voice came again.

"Yes. I know you," it said. It was thicker now, more blurred. "I do not want you. Is Gladys there? . . . Gladys, I know you are there. Gladys, I feel it my duty to speak. But who is it that has . . . has . . . has made me speak? . . . It is all dark. . . . I don't know. . . . Oh, Gladys, are you there?" The voice was cut off sharply and there took its place another moaning, lower at its inception and rising with a more rapid and horrible crescendo than had its predecessors. The moaning too died away, and for an instant there was silence. But only for an instant. The quiet was shattered by a sudden flurry. Upon Maud Vassar's left hand, half-way up the table, Mrs. Barratt had shot to her feet with the action of a badly manipulated marionette. With a curious stiff gesture she had thrown thin black-clad arms, their elbows bent, above her head. Her chair fell with a dull crash on to the thick carpet. She swayed, hands still above her head, eyes staring. And then, crumpling like a deflated toy, fell in a tumbled heap atop of the chair.

No one moved, for simultaneously with the sight and sound of the woman's fall, had come the voice again. "Look after her," it said. "Look after her. . . . I was not good to her. . . . When she has been tended I will ask for Gladys again. . . . Are you there, Gladys? Are you there?"

The voice of the girl came in answer. It was, astonishingly in this astounding night, very low and very calm. It said, in a dull monotone:

" I am here, mother."

" There is . . ." said the voice, " there is . . . something I must . . . I must try to tell you. Oh, God! They are trying to stop me." The voice grew faint. It came now out of the bearded throat like a child's whisper, breeze-borne from far away. " Look after . . . look after . . . I will try . . . I will try . . ." The voice died away altogether.

There was silence again in the shadows of the great room. Maud Vassar spoke. She looked straight before her. She said, very low:

" Will some one please attend to Mrs. Barratt."

But Charles was already on his feet. He lifted the chair and stood it against the wall. With Pursell's aid, he picked up the limp, black-clad body and sat it in the chair and pressed the grey head down until it rested against the silk-clad knees. The woman sighed and stared. At last she sat upright. With feebly desperate hands she waved succour away. They left her where she was, sitting against the wall, looking, in the cross shadows of the two dim lights, like a wax effigy which has been by some aborted miracle brought half to life.

Quietly, stealthily almost, Charles and Pursell resumed their seats. There came, so sudden and so loud as to bring a terrified gasp from more than one woman's throat, the voice again. This time it was preceded by no moan, and although thick and blurred still it was twice as loud as it had been. It said:

" Gladys, you are still there, aren't you? Yes, I can feel you. . . . Gladys, you must look after Lesley. Lesley is in danger. You know that, but you don't know how grave the danger is. I feel it my duty to warn you, to order you, to implore you, in the name of any sorrow you may have felt for my passing and any love you may have had for me during my life, to

listen attentively to what I have to say in order that Lesley, poor child, shall not be killed by fools.

" Listen, Gladys, listen! And all the others who now I begin dimly to feel are with you. Maud Vassar, listen! Norman Sandys, listen! Trevor Pursell, listen! Claude Lester, listen! Listen all of you!"

For a moment the voice died away and silence came. There was an uneasy shifting of strained, tense bodies, and then with a choking gasp, the girl Agnes Hicks fell forward so that her fair fluffy head hit the oak table with a small thud. No one paid heed to her. From behind them, in the queer criss-cross shadow thrown by the two lights, there came a sudden gabbling prayer from the lips of the effigy which bore the outward yet distorted seeming of the woman Barratt.

Another moaning from the throat and lips of Stürm, who now sprawled in his chair so low that except to those immediately opposite him his torso and head were hardly visible. And then the voice again.

" I can see into the minds of some of you. I can see into the mind of Maud Vassar. I can see into the mind of you, Gladys, my darling child. I can see into Claude's little mean mind. I can see into the mind of the man Fox-Browne. And other minds, too, I can see into. I can see into all your minds." The voice was mounting, and as it mounted in strength so it became more blurred in tone and outline. Every word was audible but seemed only just audible.

"After this," said the voice, "there will not be many of you who do not believe. And yet it is strange that those of you who believed before—at least you, Maud Vassar, and you, Gladys, have so distorted your beliefs, that you have got *through* to me upon This Side expecting that if I came and spoke to you across The Edge, it would be to tell you that you are right in holding that my death was caused by something which was not man.

You have got *through* to me, *but* I am not going to tell you what you expect me to tell you. I am going to tell you, as I have already told you, that Lesley is not guilty of my death. And then I am going to tell you—listen all of you, listen!—this is hard for me, I am strong now, but I do not know how long I can keep up this great effort—I am going to tell you also that my death was caused by man. There are two people with you . . . there are two people with you . . ."

The voice, from having been brazenly loud, was growing faint and fainter. It said, in the far-away whisper:

"There are two people with you who *know* how my life on Your Side was ended. Not one person, Gladys. But two! . . . Oh, Gladys, are you there? You are going. Don't go, dear. . . . Maud . . . Maud . . . You know . . . you know . . . help me, help me!" The last two words dropped into the silence like the ghosts of sighs, hardly rippling the surface of the quiet. Another moan and then a transformation in the medium so unexpected and so terrible as to freeze blood within veins. From its lolling, half-couchant position, the square stolid body of Stürm jerked itself upright as if plucked by unseen giant fingers. From the white forehead beads of sweat now rolled down and lost themselves in the bushiness of the beard. The eyes were wide open and fixed in a glassy, dark, inhuman stare. But the face, until now immobile save for the barely moving lips, was now distorted and working like the face of an epileptic. There came from the lips not the blurred and hollow-seeming and drowsy semi-replica of the dead woman's voice; not the low crescendo moaning; not the nasality; not the high piping voice which had been the first voice. There came, instead, a wild and uncouth and harshly animal babbling; a sound like the cries of an animal which has been tortured into learning speech. No words were distinguishable and yet many

around the table felt that in each foul sound they should have distinguished a word.

Suddenly with a high head note the babbling ceased and there came, immediately upon its cessation, a choked shriek from the throat of the boy Rogers. Maud Vassar slowly turned her head. Her eyes fixed themselves upon the boy and instantly he was silent. He trembled violently, but no more noise came from him.

A silence fell, compared to which all other silences had been as nothing in density. It was broken, after many moments, by a faint, faint whispering. At first this whispering was indistinguishable, but it mounted and mounted until it became not merely a steady, sibilant hissing but divided itself into words growing each more audible than its predecessor. And once more Stürm was half-sitting and half-lying. And once more his face was a white, black-bearded mask, with only the lips alive.

". . . so difficult," said the voice. "They forced me away. They are stronger than I am but I am fighting. I am fighting. Help me all of you. Help me, Gladys! Maud, help me! Claude, you are not trying to help me. . . . I *will!* I *will!*"

A long pause. And then, clanging and triumphant, the voice came at full strength again. It said:

"I have won. I know what I must do and I will do it! It is my duty. Do you think there would be any peace for me on This Side if I did not try? If I let Them defeat me? There is duty Here as well as with you. I said: 'Did you hear me?' My death lies at the door of two persons who are sitting with all of you now. One man and one woman. So that you may be able to persuade even the fools who administer the laws that you are not talking without foundation, I will tell you how this man and this woman killed me. It was not done upon impulse. It was done as the result of a

long and carefully prepared plan. My inhabitation of the house in which you are now helped this plan, in fact brought it into being. These two would have killed me at some time and in some place. It was written that they should kill me. They were helped by my inhabitation of the house in this way: The house is sinister and terrible and these two planned to make my death seem a repetition of that history. . . . I am growing tired and They will try soon again to stop me. . . . Gladys, I must hurry. Are you listening? I must hurry. . . . This is how they killed me. The man took water into my room in the morning, hiding it carefully. He filled a brass urn in my room with this water. I bade you all good-night before I died and I went into my room. I had no thought of any evil hovering about me. But presently evil came. The man entered my room. I was not surprised, having expected him. I was sitting at my table. He walked up to me. He had a handkerchief in his hand. He leaned over my table to face me. Suddenly he thrust out the hand with the handkerchief in it. He squeezed the handkerchief and broke what was inside it—a tube of something which smelt of peardrops. The fumes worked as he had hoped they would. I swooned. . . . Listen, Gladys, listen. I *know* all this. You must listen. . . . Quickly he emptied my big silver ash-tray and poured into it water from the brass urn. He set the silver bowl upon the table and held my face into it so that the water covered my nose and mouth. And I was drowned. I watched from Here while he dragged the shell of me from the chair to the couch and laid it upon the couch and then set about making this foul man's deed look like the deed of a foul fiend. To account for the smell of the drug with which he had made me insensible, he took my nail polish from my bag, uncorked it and spilt it with the other contents. He then upset the table by my bed

and arranged everything to look as if, before I died, I had knocked it over. He then pulled away the telephone wires from their connection. He then went back, after a quick glance at his thoroughly planned and swiftly executed handiwork, to the table. The bronze urn stood on the floor beside it. He tipped the water that was left in the silver bowl back into the urn. Then he lifted the urn and clapped it to his mouth and drank; and drank. I saw that there was now upon his hands—he must have put them on immediately after I had swooned—a pair of black gloves. He put a black-gloved hand into his pocket and brought out two small folded towels. With one of these he dried and polished the silver bowl, picked up the cigarette stubs from the paper upon which he had put them, and dropped them back into the bowl. He then screwed up the paper, covered with ashes as it was, and thrust it into his pocket. He then wiped out and dried the bronze urn, using first the damp towel and secondly the dry one. He put both soiled towels into his pocket and with his black-gloved hands lifted the urn back to its place on the book-shelf. He worked with great speed and the decision which can only come of careful planning. He went to the door. He opened the door and looked out. He came back into the room and put something through the key. And then, stooping, he thrust a thread attached to this thing underneath the door. He went out. And from beside my shell I watched the key, strained by the thread attached to it through its handle, slowly turn. He then went about his ways. . . . I was on the Outer Edge, I could not see well. But soon I saw, for They showed me, laughing, how to see. And what They showed me was the woman. And the woman, sitting in her room with an apparatus about her head, was speaking into a strange, odd-seeming mouthpiece. And then They showed me, still laughing, how the wire from this apparatus went down

and joined itself on to the wire outside the window in which my shell lay. And They showed me a man downstairs answering what sounded like my voice—the voice that the woman, diabolically clever as she was, had been studying to imitate for a year of your time. She spoke in my voice and was answered by Norman Sandys. That was the first time. The second time I saw her, for They showed her to me again, she was still at her strange telephone and she was crying out in my voice—unmistakably in my voice—for help. And then, after she had cried out, she plucked the apparatus from her head and threw it down and went to her window and leaned out and took hold of the wire of her telephone and pulled very hard with both hands and, presently, coiled up a lot of wire and hid it, together with other things. . And downstairs I saw dimly men racing up to find, behind bolted windows and a locked door, the body I was so used to wearing. . . .

"That is all. . . . I cannot say how grateful I am to you and Maud, Gladys, for getting *through* to me. I should have tried but I might not have succeeded. . . ." Suddenly the voice began to wane. "I might not have succeeded and then these living devils would not have been brought to justice. Instead, the poor child Lesley would have suffered. They did not intend, at first, to implicate any other living being, but they found soon that there was danger in that there were people in this house who thought that it was possible for humans to have done this thing. . . ."

The voice was now erratic. Certain words were loud and blaring and others faint and whispering. But always it was fully audible. It said:

"And as soon as this possibility was thought of, they hid these incriminating things, which they had been unable so far to get rid of, in the room where Lesley

was. They chose Lesley because they knew that Lesley could be made to look guilty. . . ."

The voice's words were coming now very slowly. It was as if each were a tremendous effort. They came tearing slow way out of the dead-white face of the medium. The tone was now not loud even in bursts. It was a steady and dragging whisper. It said:

"And now I will tell you who this man and this woman are. They are sitting with you at that table. . . ."

The voice was drowned by another voice; a human voice.

"My God!" said Pursell on a harsh, cracked note. He stood up suddenly and then, fighting for control, sat. "I'm sorry," he muttered.

"The woman," came the faint whisper, "is called among you, although she is not of the nationality to which she pretends, Thérèse Gautier."

There was an instant hush; appalled and hideous. Twenty-eight eyes were turned. The face of Thérèse was in shadow, but even in the dimness, the watching eyes could see her frightful pallor. But she made no sound. Before her, her hands gripped on to the edge of the table as a drowning man's hands might grip to a spar.

"And the man's name," said the whisper, "is . . . Norman Sandys."

Again the voice was drowned by human interruption; this time a shrill and tortured sound, half moan, half shriek, from the throat of Gladys Lester-Greene.

"One more word," whispered the voice, once more dropping its slow hissing words into the black pool of silence. "Gladys, I charge you to use, as you love justice and the memory of me, all your endeavour to have the woman who calls herself Gautier punished equally if not more than Norman Sandys. It is Gautier

who has been all along the instigator. It is Gautier who has bent Norman to her will. See that justice does not miscarry as it might have had I not spoken. Gautier is guilt. Norman merely a tool for guilt. Make them hang Gautier first. . . ."

A scream, strangely and horribly compound of dread and rage and hysteria, shattered the silence. Thérèse Gautier was on her feet. Her face was distorted. Her lips writhed and there came from them in a stream of fluent, easy English a torrent of words.

"No," she said. "No. No. It was *not!* It's wrong. It's wrong! It's wrong! It wasn't me. It was Norman's idea, I tell you. His. His. *HIS!* He *made* me do it! Two years ago he first started talking about it. Norman, damn you! Get up and tell them that she lied. It was a lie. A lie. A *LIE!* Norman, do you hear me?"

The others sat as if turned to stone statues of astonishment and horror. The small lithe form of the woman seemed to hurl itself round the table. To meet her rose Norman Sandys, ashy pale. He said, muttering between clenched teeth:

"Quiet, you fool! Quiet! They can't do anything on this stuff. Quiet, quiet!"

But she would have none of this. Passion and fear held her shaking in hysterical frenzy. She went on, her voice rising to a wild shriek in which every word, though distorted, beat clear upon the listeners' ears:

"It's a lie! It's a lie! It *was* you. You, you devil! You swine! It *was* you. . . ." Her hands went up to her throat. "They can't hang me, but you ought to hang. You've betrayed me. Why was I ever such a fool—such a bloody fool? I'll tell them. My God, I'll tell them everything Everything. Everything! I'll tell them about Horton, too. God damn you, Norman! I'll tell what was at the back of your mind. I'll tell what you've only hinted to me. . . . Listen, you

people, listen!" She swung round suddenly, arms flung wide. She stood with staring eyes and working face like a twentieth century Medusa. She screamed:

"What he wanted to do was to kill the old woman and marry the girl and then he was going to . . ."

Sandys made a wild leap at her, to find that there stood in his way Charles Fox-Browne.

"No you don't!" said Charles. His right hand shot out. It caught Sandys by the collar and held him, shaking slightly. For a moment the man struggled, then, with a lifting of his shoulders, stood still as death.

". . . to kill the old woman and marry the girl and then kill the girl. *That* was his idea! The girl got the old girl's money. Norman gets the girl. The girl dies. And Norman has the money. Perhaps I should have shared it. Perhaps not."

She flung round on him, pointing at him a finger which trembled with her rage and terror. "Deny that if you can, you bastard!" she said.

"It would not," said Sandys in a hard and cold and metallic voice, "be much good, would it?"

The hand in his collar tightened. "You did it?" said Charles slowly.

Again the ironic lift of Sandys's trim shoulders. "Of course," he said. "Not much good fighting with a bitch-cat like that against you.'

"Thanks very much," said Charles. And then, amazingly, whistled shrilly a single note.

The great chandelier sprang into sparkling, glittering life. Soft bright light flooded the room. Shadows fled swift and stealthily to their corners. Round the table, the seated men and women looked like badly made dummies. From behind the heavy curtains drawn across the bays of the windows, came, furtive and yet triumphant, Willis. Behind him followed a small man in plain clothes; a man who, as he emerged, was closing

a note-book and thrusting a pencil into his pocket. And behind him again came Holt and the burliest of his constables.

In her throat Gladys Lester-Greene made a curious choking sound. She stood up. She turned. Her dark eyes stared for a moment at Sandys, now out of Charles's grip and with a hand of the Law upon each shoulder. She put out her hand, then drew it back and held its palm pressed close over her eyes. She swayed. Charles caught her as she fell.

At the far end of the table Maud Vassar rose slow and stately as a Norn. Her face was white as death, but she moved with a steady step. She came slowly towards Charles and the swooning girl against his arm. Maud Vassar looked into Charles's eyes. He could not read what her thoughts might be. She said, in a low and flat voice which yet had behind it an edge like a sharp sword:

"And who is that?" Her long arm rose slowly from her side and the index finger of its hand pointed over Charles's right shoulder.

He craned round as best he might to see behind him the short thick figure of the medium, no longer vacant, no longer Germanic, but very plainly, judging from the working of his features and the scratching of his fingers, a man who would be glad, so soon as might be, to rid himself of false hair stuck upon a sensitive face.

Charles brought his eyes back to the old lady's. "I'm sorry," he said. "We had to do it." He turned again as blunt fingers tapped him violently upon the shoulder.

"For God's sake, Foxy," said a harsh voice into his ear, "let's get rid of the shrubbery."

EPILOGUE

I

A MAN and a woman stood in the dark of a November night before a house whose white compact bulk shone softly at them through the blackness. They stood side by side. They were very close but their bodies did not touch. The woman's head, covered by a small close-fitting hat, showed just above the man's right shoulder.

Behind them, they heard the car in which they had come make off with a grinding of low gears and a spurting of frost-bitten gravel beneath its tyres. Before them, two windows upon either side of the door of the house broke into warm yellow life.

"Where . . . where are we?" said Lesley. Her voice was low and uncertain. It seemed suggestive of tears, but of tears which arose from a plenitude of content.

Charles turned. Through the dark he looked down at her to see her face as a white oval of which he had, deliciously, to guess the features and expression. He said:

"Riley's. Good fellow; don't be misled by his bark. No bite at all."

Lesley put back her head and a lovely small gurgling of laughter came from her throat. She said:

"I'm sorry. I love the way you talk. You seem so frightened of having to say more than you need that you sound rather like an old colonel by Maud Diver."

Charles grinned. He put out a hand to take her elbow in his fingers to guide her to the porch steps. His fingers touched the soft fur of the squirrel coat—and withdrew, sharply, as if they had burnt themselves. He said, in a voice not without strain:

"Let's go in. They may be waiting."

Side by side they walked to the foot of the three steps and slowly began to mount them. The porch was a dark and homely shadow. For the top step the woman did not raise her foot sufficiently. She caught her toe. A little cry sprang from her and she lurched forward.

Charles could move quickly. He moved now faster than ever in his life. Before even her knees could reach the tiles, Lesley was caught by his arms.

She gasped a little and laughed.

She was set upright upon her feet. But the arms which had so set her did not leave her. Instead they closed firmer about her slim roundness. Charles said: "I didn't mean to . . . but I can't help it! I must know. . . . Tell me!"

"Tell you what?" Her voice was very low and very soft and she did not raise her head to speak.

"Tell me"—Charles's voice was thick and hoarse and sounded in his own ears like another man's—"tell me that I was right about yesterday."

She shifted a little in his arms, but not with a movement which showed any desire to free herself. She bent back her head and her eyes—two dark wells in the dimness—looked up into the blurred oval which was all she could see of his face. Against her body she could feel the over-quick hammer beatings of his heart. She said, in a voice which seemed to him at once cool like running water and glowing like molten gold:

"Of course you were right . . . dear!"

2

Riley's study was a room of pleasant and comfortable untidiness. It was warm but not too warm; haphazard but not too haphazard; and at the last entirely characteristic of its owner.

Its owner stood, short and thick and vital, before the

fire of coal and log. Facing him, at an angle slightly to his right, there lay back, comfortably but still with something about his pose of the rigidity of his profession, Archibald Willis. A half-full tumbler whose dark colour testified to the worthiness of its contents stood upon a table at Willis's right hand. Another tumbler of a colour still deeper was in the right hand of the owner of the room. His left hand caressed every now and then, with tender, consoling fingers, his cheeks and chin and neck.

"Blast that spirit gum!" he said. "Thought I should never get the damn stuff off." He craned his head to look at a clock on the mantel behind him. He said:

"He ought to be down in a minute. Then we can ask him all those questions."

"Aye!" said Willis, both more human and less genteel than was his custom.

The word was hardly past his lips when the door opened. Charles came in. His face was so expressionless, so mask-like, that, to any one who knew him at all well, it was evident that emotions far beyond the ordinary had him in their grip.

Riley looked at him and grinned. Riley said:

"Enter Abelard Blake!"

"Eh?" said Charles sharply, and frowned.

Willis rose, tall and scrawny and more badger-like than ever. He stood to face Charles. He said, with a trace in his voice of a diffidence most unusual and not without its charm:

"I wonder, sir, whether you would shake hands."

Charles smiled a smile which cracked his forbidding mask. It was a wide smile and a happy smile and a friendly smile. "All night if you like," he said. He held out his hand and Willis took it and they shook.

Riley went to a side table from which there came a chinking of glasses. He said, over his shoulder:

"Oy, Foxy! Whisky? Brandy? Port? Benedictine? Or Bull's Blood?"

"Thanks," said Charles. "Whisky."

Riley brought him a glass and thrust it into his hand and then with strong and urgent fingers shepherded him to a chair and almost hurled him into it. He went back with his own glass and stood once more before the fire. He looked up at the lean and now rather pathetically awkward Willis. He said:

"For God's sake sit down, man! Haven't we been sitting here panting for this bloke to come so that we could ask him questions. And there you go standing about like a suburban matron wondering whether she ought to be saying 'Really, it's time we must go.'"

Charles took a long drink from his glass and set it down upon the floor beside his low chair. He looked up at his host, but before he could speak Riley had himself spoken.

"How is she?" said Riley.

Charles smiled. "Very well. She's eaten enormously. Just going to bed. Assisted by Mrs. Baxter. Says she's going to sleep twenty-four hours."

"You," said Riley, "aren't going to have any rest, me lad, until you've put a couple of worried minds at rest. 'Tisn't a bit of good kicking. That's what I say, and what I say goes. Here at least."

"Whose minds?" said Charles. "At what rest?"

"My mind, and the mind of little Archie here. We saw how what you arranged came off, but there are a lot of things we want to ask you. If you don't tell us, we shall think it was a fluke and you couldn't bear that. . . . How was my bit?"

"You," said Charles, with a sudden grim earnestness

more flattering than any praise, " were, definitely, all right. Wouldn't have believed you could do it."

" You never know," said Riley, patting himself on his broad, deep chest, " what the little man can do. . . . I told you, and you at any rate ought to have known I was an actor. Don't you remember at Concheville when the Concert Party didn't turn up—the night you made such a damn fool of yourself. . . . But never mind about that now. Business. Now then, Mr. Sexton Browne, what I and Aunty Willis here want to know, first, is this: Granted that you soon found out, owing to your great intuitive and observatory powers, that the murder *could* have been done by a human being, how in God's name did you manage to fix upon Sandys as the murderer?"

" Exactly, sir." Willis leant forward eagerly in his chair, his badger's eyes bright with enthusiasm and perhaps two more whiskies than his normal co-efficient. " Exactly. How did you manage to fix on Sandys when there were plenty of other people who your case—that is, your deductions from the state of the study—would have fitted better."

Riley looked with fierce encouragement at Charles. " Come on, Foxy," he said. " We know you don't like talking, but you've got to talk. You can make it as snappy as you like, but we've got to have it."

Charles grinned. " Easy. Poltergeist first. Every one had tales about it; but all of 'em were possible by human agency *except* Sandys's tale about the broken vase in his room. . . ."

Willis, overcoming diffidence, objected with good-humoured violence. " That won't do, sir. Lots of those tales—at least assuming some of them to be true—weren't possible because . . ."

Charles interrupted. He shook his head. He looked at Willis sadly. He said: " Oh, Willis! If you mean

don't say it. There must have been a master key. Mrs Barratt's got one, of course, but what easier than for Sandys to have one too. Sandys superintended the inhabitation of the house. . . . Oh, Willis!"

There was no offence in the tone and Willis took none.

"I'm sorry," he said and smiled, the grey moustache lifting at the mouth corners. "I see."

"What," said Riley, "about spectral hands? I suppose you'll tell me that it was a padded glove painted with phosphorus on the end of a stick."

Charles nodded. "Exactly. And a mistake. Poltergeists, if you look 'em up as I have, don't play pranks like that. They just break china and move cook's hairnet."

"And the noises?" said Willis. "I suppose you're going to tell us, sir, that those were an essential part of the man's scheme? After he'd created a sort of *tradition* of noises, as it were, any he would have to make over the telephone tapping . . ."

Again Charles interrupted. "Exactly. They would be explained before they were made. Also, most people would be frightened to see what they were. . . . More things against Sandys were, one, the fact, as the woman herself told me, that he had implored Enid Lester-Greene not to use the east wing room as her study when he must have known that opposition only drove her. Two, that as the murderer, to have got water into it, must have been some one with unquestioned access to the study, it could only be the servant responsible for the study or —the most likely person—Secretary Sandys. Three, that it was Sandys who actually arranged what we were all to do. On the night of the murder, I mean. Unobtrusively, of course, but without doubt. Four, that the bridge table was set in such a place that if they had gone on playing, as the murderer must have allowed for, no one sitting at it could see any tricks played by

any one coming out of the study—and it was Sandys who set up the bridge table, having first arranged the bridge party. Five—the most important—that the last person *known* to be in the study was Sandys. Reversing fiction is the right way to get at fact. In fiction it is always most unlikely that the murderer is the last person known to have seen the corpse. In real life it is most likely. This *is* real life. Sandys was the last person known to have *seen* the corpse. Easy step from point five to thinking how the telephone wangle could have been done. . . . I'll tell you another thing, too. Perhaps it'll stop your questions. I'm reasonable. I hate things that don't fit. And I never liked the mixture of freak poltergeist, ghostly hands, old legends, and tragedy. Poltergeists and murders don't go. But a poltergeist makes noises. It also creates panicky atmosphere—especially in a house which there are stories about. My reason didn't like the mixture of maskelyne and defunct."

Riley grunted out a laugh. "But what," he said, "about masculine and feminine? In other words, because you had got Sandys as the murderer, you must have known that he had a confederate. Otherwise the telephone business would have been impossible. Come on now, Foxy! How in God's name did you hitch up this Gautier girl with Sandys?"

Charles grinned. "Easiest of the lot. Because they were so obviously *un*hitched. You heard about the kiss episode which I interrupted? And then Gautier's complaint—vide diary—to her mistress. If she had left well alone with the clout she gave him—quick little devil!—when she heard me coming round the corner, I might never have got on to it from that angle. But they had to elaborate. They over-elaborated all the time. The girl went and complained. Also she found out where I was sleeping and brought in my tea the next morning

and complained to me. Too much complaint from a snappy, Parisian piece because a young man's snatched a buss. Especially when even if Parisian piece had disliked young man so much, she'd have been too excited about sudden death in the night to come and tell a stranger that first thing in the morning. . . . Would it help to stop your questions if I told you something else? When she came in that morning she gabbled. She gabbled like a stage French woman. Not a real one. Couldn't get her broken English consistent. Couldn't even get her genders right. Or her idiom. I was a 'charmante' monsieur—sort of hermaphrodite gigolo! 'Always' was '*tout-le-temps*.' It wouldn't do. Only thing right was accent; but then she was—witness the telephone voice—a mimic. Good as you, Riley. . . . Now let's shut up and have a drink."

Riley grinned his grin of an angry dog. "Not on your life. There's lots more to come, Foxy! What about old Lady Mabel Stoopantouchit? How did you spruce her about that Stürm business?"

"Maud Vassar," said Charles, his eyelids, against his will, beginning to drop over tired eyes, "had never seen Stürm. I got his name out of the encyclopædia. I tapped her. When I found she hadn't ever seen him it was all jam."

"I wonder," said Riley in a new voice, "whether we've done any harm?"

Willis blinked. "Harm, sir?"

Riley nodded, gravely. "There's an old woman, this Lady Flybynight, who lives her life in a sort of dream of the Other Side. Foxy and I have gone and pulled both her legs right off. Doesn't matter what she thinks of us, of course, but shall we send her . . ."

"No," said Charles with decision. "Too well

balanced. Thinks too much of herself as well. If we've anything to worry about, it's the girl."

"Then we haven't anything to worry about," Riley said. "The girl passed out before she knew it was a spoof. And I had a word with old Lady Flukempoosh. She's an old Tartar, but she won't split. . . . Now, Foxy, here's your next? How long did you take to write that spiel you gave me this morning?"

Charles opened his eyes with effort. "All night," he said.

"Quick at that," said Riley. "I didn't attempt to learn all of it. 'Fraid I improvised a bit. But I got the important parts."

Willis, who had been draining his glass, choked over the dregs. "You certainly did, sir," he said, a coughing laugh shaking every word. He turned to Charles. He wiped his lips with a handkerchief. He said:

"Now, Mr. Fox-Browne, as you are being so good as to put our minds at rest, perhaps you'd answer one or two little questions *I* have for you."

Charles opened his eyes. "Shoot!" he said.

"What would you have done, sir," said Willis, leaning forward with bony elbows resting upon bonier knees, "if this *séance* idea of yours hadn't worked?"

Charles looked at him with eyes bright from sleeplessness. Charles laughed. He said:

"God knows! . . . But I knew it would work. The atmosphere of that house was a spook atmosphere. I knew, provided Riley played his part, that we could spook either Sandys or his bit into cracking." He laughed again; a short, hard sound. "You can't tell me I didn't know, because it worked."

"There's one thing, sir," said Willis with a dogged diffidence. "That join in the telephone wire outside the study window; I can see that it was easy to *make* the join because what with the noises and every one

being scared to death with this pol . . . pol . . . pol . . . whatever you call it, anything could be done in the middle of a night before the murder. But when we looked at where the extra line had been, we found, just as you told us, that the naked place had been covered with pitch. . . ."

"Oh, Willis!" said Charles. "There was poltergeist after the murder too. Mild, but there. There had to be in any case. Sudden cessation might have caused attention. Poltergeist did the tarring. Long stick." He broke off to drink. He said ruminatively, after the pause: ". . . It was a queer house with queer things happening in it. But the queer things were human queer things like Lester and that housemaid; like Sandys's ability to inspire passion even in the girl Gladys; like the semi-religious, semi-egoistic madness of the Barratt woman; like the trouble those two—Sandys and Gautier—must have been at to produce their poltergeist door-openings and things without being caught; like Sandys drinking that water; like me talking. . . . Reminds me I've done enough of that for a month. Finished now."

APRIL, 1931.

DEATH COMES TO PERIGORD

AUTHOR'S NOTE

While the background of this tale is real, the characters figuring in it are all entirely imaginary and have no existence outside the covers of the book. The author is anxious that this should be clearly understood, as he would be more than sorry to wound the susceptibilities of any one on an island to which he owes so much.

CONTENTS

CHAP		PAGE
I.	A NIGHT VISIT	9
II.	MÈRE TROUTEAUD	24
III.	THE AVOCAT TALKS	31
IV.	INVESTIGATION	42
V.	THE GILT TENNIS BALL	49
VI.	WHERE IS DE QUETTVILLE?	66
VII.	THE TWO MEN IN THE WINE SHOP	80
VIII.	THE KNIFE IN THE DOOR	94
IX.	A CALL ON THE TELEPHONE	113
X.	LE MARINEL BRINGS NEWS	122
XI.	HOW WE CAUGHT DE QUETTVILLE	132
XII.	McNAB TAKES A HAND	151
XIII.	A CLUE OUT OF SEQUENCE	165
XIV.	SURPRISE FOR AN AVOCAT	179
XV.	SHOCKS FOR A CHIEF CONSTABLE	186
XVI.	CAREY CREATES A DEADLOCK	200
XVII.	BOQUET DE L'ILE	213
XVIII.	CLIMAX	227
XIX.	THE COST OF A GALLOWS	242

CHAPTER I

A NIGHT VISIT

WITH a screech of rusty hinges the green door in the high blank wall opened and the avocat, Le Marinel, for whose house I was then looking, stepped into sight. He was a neatly dressed, dapper little man, and there was something bird-like in the succession of eager, snappy little nods he made when he saw me. As he advanced with outstretched hand it now struck me that he looked more like an Oriental than a European. And it was probably those almond-shaped eyes of his and the swart complexion which prompted my first remark.

"You know," I said, as we shook hands, "it's deuced hard to believe this island of yours is real."

Le Marinel, as if to consider this, cocked his head to one side, like a thoughtful bird this time. I had been but one week on the island, having come to look after the practice of a doctor friend, an old fellow student, who needed a change. The duty so far had been almost a sinecure, although I was, in fact, then meeting the avocat to report on a patient about whose condition he was anxious.

"You mean," he said at length, "that it looks the sort of place where nothing happens."

This time the sidelong glance he gave me was more than ever bird-like.

"That's true; it does look like that, but it's not what I meant. What I meant was that for an island in the Channel less than ninety miles from England it has too many incredible differences; it looks, in fact, almost Oriental."

The avocat seemed mystified.

" Oriental ? " he repeated, with a rising inflection.

" More like a bit of Tunis or Algiers," I affirmed. " Why look, for instance, at this very road, so long and narrow, stretching between those high blank walls with invisible houses and hidden people behind them, I suppose. And look at those tall palm trees which seem to be peering over the walls as if stretching their necks, watching for something to happen in this deserted alley. Look at those shadows too, sharply cut as if by a knife in this brilliant white, un-English sunlight ; and look at the colour, is that not Eastern ? "

I indicated the end of the tunnel-like Rue Galette along which we were now walking, for at the far end, framed like a picture by the tall shadowed walls, one caught a glimpse of an incredibly blue sea on the horizon of which another island was just discernible, pale as an opal, ethereal as a mirage of the desert.

Le Marinel smiled indulgently as he followed my pointing finger. He was, I fancy, not quite sure whether my suggestion about the Oriental quality in his island pleased him or not, and half-stopped as if to re-examine, in his lawyer-like way, the evidence I had adduced. But before his deliberate mind found any comment to make, and while I too pulled up, another of those doors in the wall opened noiselessly, almost at Le Marinel's ear. It was not, however, the unexpectedness of the thing that took me aback ; it was the appearance of the man and the woman seen in the doorway. The woman seemed to be showing the man out ; and that from the look of him was what any decent person would want to do with him. Familiar as my East London hospital experience had made me with so many types of humanity, there was something about this fellow that took my eye so that I scarcely glanced at the woman. He was tall and almost incredibly thin, but did not suggest any delicacy of constitution. On the contrary he seemed

wiry and active, rather, as regards physical strength, like an Arab in that his strength was that of tendon and sinew rather than muscle. Yet though he somehow had the air of being unused to his present clothes, he was certainly a European. His face was rather long, with sharp features that showed no trace of hair. Even the eyebrows above the shifty pale blue eyes were hairless. Lipless too, he was, but long in the nose like a rat.

So much, with the swift eye which a medical practitioner inevitably develops, I took in before we passed on and Le Marinel spoke.

" I see what you mean," he said ; " the Eastern effect is undoubtedly there in those palms and our architecture."

But when I touched his arm he turned in surprise.

" Who are those two ? " I inquired.

" Those two ? " he echoed vaguely.

" The two we passed just now."

" Oh, yes. The woman was Cæsar Brisson's housekeeper, the other I have never before seen."

Le Marinel had his eye on me as he said this. He was, I thought, mildly surprised at my rapid shift of interest from the island to the pair I had seen.

" Now," he went on, " if it had been Cæsar himself who attracted your interest, that I could have understood."

" And who is this Cæsar Brisson ? " I inquired.

" He is a wine seller and keeps his shop on the quay. A man with a personality nowadays, and of very striking appearance ; big as a bullock and broad as a house, you would say. French, of course, but Cæsar never wears a hat on his blue-black thatch of hair, and has bold eyes that take in everything, not like that fellow who caught your interest just now."

" Well, you know," I explained half-apologetically, " I've a curious feeling about the man ; I fancy I have seen him before."

"Ah," Le Marinel nodded, "and you cannot recall where or when?"

"No; and that is odd too, for he is of a type one would not readily forget. Besides, I have a notion, from the swift, furtive glance he shot at me, that he remembered me."

Le Marinel smiled.

"Which suggests his memory of you is something less than pleasant. No doubt he can remember the where and the when of your meeting. Of course," he went on in the tone of one dismissing a trifle, "we get a fair number of undesirables here, mostly men who seek refuge from justice"

"French or English justice?" I inquired.

"Chiefly French, but they are not all criminal, you understand. As often as not they are here simply to evade their term of military service."

By this time we had reached the end of the narrow Rue Galette, and the avocat paused at the top of the hundred or so of steps which ultimately led down and round to the small square in which the Court House stood. The view opened out by the high point at the top of those steps was what a guide-book would call panoramic. Far below lay the harbour, its smooth waters fretted by the rigging of ships, and out beyond stood the dark mass of Castle Cornet keeping guard like a great battleship at the harbour's mouth. The English mail boat was just clearing the breakwater, her red funnel topped by a whirling column of black smoke. And far away beyond that heavy line of smoke on the horizon of the crystalline sea, dream-like in the faintness and delicacy of its outlines, one saw the French coast. On either side of me all the quaint old houses of the terraced town seemed to be rising one above another, in a wild endeavour to miss nothing of the spectacle.

Indeed, so enchanted was I by the sudden vista of

vivid colour and wide space that opened out after we emerged from that dark alley that, for the moment, I forgot the rat-faced man, forgot even the purpose for which I had come to see the avocat. Le Marinel's soft voice recalled me.

" And de Quettville, you have see him ? "

The question was one I had previously been waiting to hear. And for a reason that will be obvious presently.

" Yes, I went last night. You need have no immediate apprehension. He has certainly got a heart, but for a man of his advanced years the beat was wonderfully strong." The recollection of certain details connected with the visit Le Marinel had requested me to make came back, and I added dryly, " Age seems to have made havoc with his temper rather than his heart."

Le Marinel smiled and shook his head deprecatingly.

" He never was an amiable character. Your friend, Dr. Wright, he did tolerate occasionally. I'm sorry if he was rude, but I tried by a telephone message to break the ice for your visit."

" Leave the ice unbroken next time ; if I have to walk on ice at all I prefer it unbroken," I remarked laughingly, for he seemed concerned.

We were then, I remember, descending the flight of steps towards the passage which ultimately led into the Court House square. The avocat pulled out his watch.

" I have still a spare half-hour before my case comes on," he said. " Would you care to have a look round the court ? We have some documents there dating from Edward the First."

Well, I wasn't as interested in documents as a lawyer might be. My interest was in human beings.

" I'd rather hear about Hilaire de Quettville," I said.

He stared at me.

" You are interested in him ? "

Before I could reply Le Marinel was met and stopped

by a straight, soldierly man, who, with an apologetic nod to me, took his arm for some private word in his ear. I passed a few paces on out of range and waited.

Interested? Certainly I was interested. To come to such an island out of the sedate, humdrum respectability of a middle-class London suburb was like stepping suddenly into the Middle Ages. English by possession this island in the Channel might be, yet in the streets of St. Peter Port one heard as much French spoken as English; exactly, I reflected, as one might have heard French spoken in England in the years following the Norman Conquest. But above all I was interested in de Quettville. No medical man is without his queer experiences, and in some way hard to define, this visit of mine to de Quettville ranked among my eeriest. Possibly the long drive on the deserted roads, and then my arrival at that great lonely house affected my imagination.

Le Marinel's message was merely a request that I should go out to Perigord in the parish of St. Pierre du Bois and make a report to him early next morning about the condition of de Quettville. For all I knew the report might have been desired in connection with a life insurance. The duty I took as a matter of routine, assuming that this de Quettville had at least agreed to the examination. Indeed, the one thing to which I gave a thought was the name of the house, for I remembered that Perigord happened to be the name of the estate owned by the great Seigneur de Montaigne; and I wondered whether the man I was going to see were old too, and wise, like the great French philosopher, and if I should find surviving in him the noble dignity, the courtly manners of a long dead régime.

Well, the house when I reached it seemed stately enough, and the grounds spacious, but the old woman who, at last getting the door open, peered at me while

shading a guttering candle from the night breeze, about her there was little indeed of courtliness. And, as I was presently to discover, there was still less in her master. But once she knew my errand glad enough she was to see me, and the strange atmosphere and flavour of a bygone age deepened, as the old crone, candle in hand, muttering satisfaction in a French *patois*, led me across a spacious hall and up a wide oak staircase, so old that it seemed to be made of stone. I *was* in another world from that of the familiar, spruce and natty little villas of Ealing among which I habitually moved. I felt, indeed, that I had stepped into another century when I was ushered into that bedroom. And probably there was nothing in it, except the occupant and the candle the woman pushed into my hand as I entered, less than two hundred years old.

The bed was an immense, towering affair with four thick carved and fluted columns, black with age, supporting a canopy of figured silk damask as big as the ceiling of a small room. And in the centre of that hearse-like structure there lay, motionless as any corpse, Hilaire de Quettville.

I might have thought him dead but for his eyes, which, catching points of light from the candle I held, glittered wickedly at me from beneath the big white night-cap he wore. That night-cap was for me the last touch in the grotesque, and fixed the impression that I had somehow stepped back into a world of the past. For I had never before seen a night-cap on a man's head except in woodcuts of eighteenth century life.

Abruptly he raised himself, his long grey beard moving like a flag as he did so, and, withdrawing one arm from beneath the sheet, with pointing forefinger indicated the door.

"*Va t'en.*"

The command was hissed rather than spoken. But I had no intention of going before I had done my job,

and as soothingly as possible told him so. For now I felt sure that Le Marinel must have good reason for sending me the urgent message I had received, though to me it looked as if I might have been more usefully employed in examining into his mental rather than his physical condition. And examine him I did, in spite of all his muttered expostulations. His heart was certainly in a flutter ; but that might be set down to his anger just as much as to any cardiac weakness, as in other respects he was, for his age, in surprisingly sound condition. He seemed, in fact, to be with ordinary care good enough for many years to come, and I could not see why I had been so urgently pressed by Le Marinel to go out that night. That thought had puzzled me even before I left Perigord.

Once I had done with the man I took up the candle from the table at the bedside with that little flurry of irritation a doctor is apt to experience in such cases. Short of accident, many a much younger man would go before de Quettville. The flutter at his heart was nothing. He probably smoked far too much. All these Channel Islanders smoked too much—tobacco was so cheap for them. Even the taxi man who drove me there had kept a cigar going all the time. And my irritation over the needless call was certainly not lessened by contact with such an ill-mannered patient. He had sunk back the moment I finished, and reclined with closed eyes, his sharp nose and white night-cap silhouetted grotesquely in black against the bed curtain opposite, the long beard showing like a waterfall. But he was very much aware of me. As I watched him with disfavour an eyelid fluttered and he waved a hand towards the door.

" *Va t'en*," he repeated crossly.

This time I went, leaving the crusty old fellow alone in his stately chamber, and thinking it was no wonder he should be left to himself in it.

But scarcely had I descended the wide staircase before I was made aware that de Quettville was not so much alone as I had supposed. At the foot of the stairs I met the same old woman who had admitted me to the house, and she, taking the candlestick out of my hand, was leading the way across the hall when I was startled by a sudden sharp sound that seemed to come from overhead. The solitary candle which the woman carried could not, of course, really illuminate more than a yard or two around us, but as I glanced up I dimly discerned a figure in white on a gallery that ran across the end of the hall. It seemed to be a woman or girl with her hair in two long plaits. She was leaning over the balcony to watch us. But the next moment there came a crash of metal and total darkness, for the old woman stumbled over some object or other and let the candle fall. It took some time to find the candlestick and relight it, and when I looked up again as I pocketed my matches, the gallery was empty.

Interested? Certainly I was interested. Not least in Le Marinel himself, who had sent me out to Perigord, and who had been so incurious as to what happened when I got there. Then just when I was beginning to fear that the half-hour would expire before my curiosity could be satisfied, I saw the other man detach himself from the avocat and hurry away.

"Sorry Carey collared me," Le Marinel said, rejoining me; "but there's enough time still left to let you see some of the documentary treasures in our archives."

This took me aback. Did the avocat not want to tell me about de Quettville? Or had he forgotten? That could hardly be, for I had indicated my interest bluntly enough. After a moment's thought I said:

"These documents have been here a long time?"

"Yes; some of them from the twelfth century."

"Then they'll keep a little longer. I'd rather hear about that old fellow, de Quettville." But as he seemed a trifle disappointed, or disconcerted, I added, "You see, as a medical man my interest lies not in dusty documents but in living flesh and blood."

Le Marinel smiled a little grimly.

"As to that, my friend," he said, "there are many here in Guernsey who would tell you there's just as little flesh and blood in Hilaire de Quettville as in my documents."

"That, of course, increases my interest in the man."

For the first time the avocat seemed—well, annoyed would be too strong a word, but *ruffled*, ruffled like a small and very neat pussy cat when one has begun to stroke it the wrong way.

"There really isn't anything to tell that isn't ancient history," he declared.

"Well, as to that," I said, using his own favourite phrase, "my curiosity begins with the history of last night."

"Last night?" he echoed, stopping dead.

"Last night," I reiterated, having decided to press him on a point where my curiosity was certainly legitimate. "Why was it necessary for me to see, at such a late hour and at such a distance, a man who is in perfectly sound health?"

Le Marinel laughed, resuming his walk.

"Ah. So that's the trouble, is it? I'm sorry, but it couldn't be helped. Yet, it's easily explained. You see, Mrs. Bichard—that's the housekeeper—sent me word late in the evening that she was frightened about him. He'd taken to his bed, and refused to have any one near him. Once when she stole up and listened at the door she heard him talking to himself."

"Talking to himself?"

"Raving was the word she used. Well, I couldn't go

myself last night as I had a conference on the case I am appearing in just now ; and, after all, it was a doctor's affair, you know. I'm sure Wright would not have minded," he added, a tincture of reproach in his tones, " even if he had found nothing amiss when he got there."

This stung me.

" He would have found nothing wrong beyond a slight palpitation. The man probably smoked too much."

" That's wrong, anyhow. He does not smoke at all."

Le Marinel seemed pleased over my mistake. He spoke in the manner of a man who was getting his own back on one who had bothered him. But his assertion surprised me.

" You are quite sure ? " I asked.

" I know ; de Quettville has none of the minor vices."

By this time we had come out on the small square in front of the Court House and were making for the row of offices, tenanted by the avocats of the Royal Court, which forms one side of the square. It is queer how small a thing, if it be connected with his work, will irritate a professional man ; and to be corrected by a layman in a matter of diagnosis—the doctor who is not hypersensitive about that would indeed be a man superior to human weaknesses. So as we walked on in silence I was striving to recollect whether my inference that de Quettville was a heavy smoker had been supported by any other observed facts than the condition of his heart. But we had reached the door of Le Marinel's office before I found any additional support for my inference.

" Then," I declared, " he must have had a lot of trouble lately to have a heart like that after a day spent in bed."

' As to that," the lawyer replied, " he's had a lot of trouble all his life ; most of it of his own making."

"This must have been some very recent mental trouble."

As I looked up at Le Marinel standing on the upper step of his office door I saw his eyes wandering over the square behind my back. There was alertness in those eyes, as if he were scanning the sunlit square for something or some one, and it was noticeable that when he spoke again he did not look at me.

"Yes, he's had some worry lately. Most of it is confidential, you understand; not for me talk about, though I've only been his agent for the last six months; and he'll probably have another acting for him inside the next six weeks. But some of his trouble is public property; you might hear it from any one on the island. The trouble connected with Mère Tronteaud and the Neptune probably is what sent him to his bed."

"Mère Tronteaud and the Neptune?" I echoed.

Le Marinel nodded. He seemed disposed to talk while he watched the square behind me. Indeed he had the air of one filling in a time of waiting.

"Mère Tronteaud is an old woman who lives in a cottage bordering on the Perigord estate. One day while cutting vraic—that is our word for seaweed, you know—she fished out of the water what she took to be the statue of one of the saints. Actually it was a life-sized effigy of the sea-god Neptune which had been the figure-head of some wrecked ship; but as he was represented kneeling, Mère Tronteaud insisted he was a holy man, in spite of the three-pronged fork in his hand. So she set the figure up in her garden, I suppose, as a sort of presiding deity, no doubt with some vague idea of bringing herself good luck. And there Neptune might have stayed, looking out to his sea till he rotted, and we should never have known anything about his presence there but for what——"

"Yes," I encouraged the avocat as he paused to watch something.

"But for what happened a few days ago," he went on, "when some malicious person or persons—probably several, for the feat needed two at least—removed the figure from Mère Tronteaud's garden and placed it right on the top of the arch of the main Perigord gateway. Before setting it there, though, they decked out the figure with a night-cap and a shirt, and repainted the beard white to suggest an image of de Quettville himself. That was bad enough, but it wasn't all. It was the last touch that got home on de Quettville. For on the three prongs of the extended trident they stuck three gilded balls."

"Three gilded balls—why?"

"Oh, well, it's an open secret that de Quettville has money at heavy interest all over the island. And it was the sight of that effigy, kneeling in his shirt over the gateway and holding out the pawnbroker's sign, that sent the island into a roar."

But as I myself laughed at the ludicrous vision thus conjured up, Le Marinel shook his head.

"If only the incident could end there," he said with a sigh; "but it's not likely to end there—it has made bad blood among too many for that."

A sudden dark flush came over the avocat's face, on which my eyes were fixed, and seeing that flush, I knew he had at last seen that for which he had been watching. I wheeled round to the square.

Over at the entrance I saw a compact body of people making for the Court House. Towards this crowd many individuals were hurriedly converging from all directions, and it was clear from the purposeful way in which all were moving that they had knowledge of a common aim in view. Then I observed that the mob was headed by a woman, an old woman, roughly clad and evidently of the peasant class. Wondering what they were up to, I

looked back at Le Marinel. The flush had gone from his face. He replied to my unspoken question.

"That is Mère Tronteaud herself. What Carey told me just now is true. She is going to raise the *clameur*."

"The *clameur*—what is that?" I asked, bewildered.

"The *clameur de Haro*, doctor, is the cry that a Channel Islander has the right to raise whenever he suffers a wrong. It is an appeal for help, elsewhere denied him, to the long dead Duke of Normandy who was the lord of his ancestors. This will not end here." He looked at me with troubled eyes and added, "You thought this was the sort of place where nothing happened, didn't you? Well, go over and see for yourself, if you are curious."

He had certainly made me mighty curious.

"Won't you come and explain?" I begged.

But he refused with a wave of his hand.

"No, indeed. I'll be dragged into it soon enough."

Well, I wasn't likely to be dragged into the affair. So it was in the spirit of a detached observer that I strolled towards the mob now gathered round Mère Tronteaud by the Court House steps. Mère Tronteaud, for all her years, was a tall, well-built woman, whose dark sun-tanned features reminded one of an Indian squaw not only in their clear-cut outlines but also by the determination stamped on every line of her face. But, as she broke into speech, standing before the steps that led up to the big door of the Court House, speech that hushed the eagerly jabbering crowd of men and women around her, she looked, in the black knitted shawl tightly crossed over her breast and tucked into the waistband of the short and rough dark blue skirt, more like a witch, a sibyl or a prophetess.

What she said I could not tell. Most Channel Islanders are bilingual, but while the townsmen's choice is English first and French afterwards, it is the other way round

with the country folk; and Mère Tronteaud spoke in the French *patois*, far too strange in itself and far too rapid in her utterance for my comprehension. Yet her very vehemence as well as the bare, brown, uplifted arm crowned by the tensely extended, claw-like fingers were eloquent enough; it was protest, appeal and denunciation in full blast.

They left a clear space round her, now whispering rapid comment to each other, now excitedly translating a particular word or obscure phrase to a friend less familiar with the *patois*. As for myself, about the one word I easily detected was the name de Quettville, and it occurred too often to be mistaken. Finally a stout policeman in a white helmet began to move the crowd back, and though he dared not interfere with Mère Tronteaud's purpose, he apparently told the old woman, in the correct French equivalent, to get on with it. At any rate, the climax to the strange scene followed. Separated now by yards of open space from the nearest spectators, down the old woman went on her knees before the old grey Court House. Then with head bowed low and arms extended high, Mère Tronteaud made her appeal for help to the semi mythical hero who in a long vanished past had been the protector of her race. In the hush that fell on the crowd I could distinguish every word.

"*Haro! Haro! Haro! à l'aide, mon Prince; on me fait tort!*"

After that loud cry the silence lasted a moment or two. There was real awe in the silence. Then a woman near me, probably a stranger like myself, spoke in a hushed whisper:

"What happens next?"

The question sounded banal enough. But it was the question I had been putting to myself. And I had not long to wait for the answer.

CHAPTER II

MÈRE TROUTEAUD

LIKE every one else, I suppose, my own eyes were on Mère Trouteaud as she rose to her feet. The moment she did so two men moved towards her. As I have since learned, those two were the formal witnesses which the procedure required, and she and the two ought now to have said the Paternoster in French. Indeed, one of the men, a stout little black-bearded fellow in his Sunday clothes of rusty black, did start off: "*Notre Père qui est au ciel,*" in a high-pitched, nervous tremolo. But he got no further than that, for the old woman, after swaying momentarily as if in a vertigo, fell forward against the stone steps. It was a heavy fall, and as she half-turned in her collapse her head struck the edge of the step with a quite audible thud.

After that I was no longer a detached observer of a curious incident, and I can remember how as I knelt down beside Mère Trouteaud the thought came that what the avocat so dreaded for himself had, after all, happened to me; I had been dragged into the affair—even before Le Marinel.

The beefy policeman in the white helmet did his best to keep the rush of sympathetic helpers at bay. But he could not stop the torrent of advice they shouted at me; and when it became evident that something more was needed than the air he had secured by driving back the crowd, we carried her over to Le Marinel's office. We carried her there simply because it was not only the nearest, but the one place I knew of; and I had to find a place, since by this time the perspiring officer was too

flustered and excited to think of anything beyond the opprobrious epithets he was hurling at the noisy, swaying crowd.

The avocat was then, no doubt, deep in his case before the court ; but his clerk, who must have seen me earlier talking to his chief on the doorstep, admitted us without demur. Mère Trouteaud we laid out on an extemporised couch in the avocat's private room behind the office. Then I turned every one out except Daniel Sarchet, the little bearded man in his Sunday clothes, who, it appeared, had walked all the way into town with her to act as witness.

" Is it that she is dead ? " he whispered as soon as we were alone, the bowler hat trembling in his hand.

" Oh, no, far from that," I reassured him. " Just a slight concussion."

He placed his hat carefully underneath his chair and then sat forward to watch me while I examined Mère Trouteaud's head for the point where it had made contact with the step.

" It is ill-luck she has had ever since it happened," Daniel Sarchet remarked.

" Ever since ? " I repeated almost absently. There was no scalp wound. Her hair, though grizzled, was still thick and plentiful, and had softened the blow. Mère Trouteaud was certainly lucky there. So nothing remained to do except wait for her to come round. I took the other chair.

" What was all this about ? " I asked Sarchet.

The little man, sitting forward on the extreme edge of his chair, and resting the palm of each hand on his knees, regarded me blankly.

" The *clameur*," I explained ; " why did she raise the *clameur* ? "

A light broke on Sarchet's face.

" Ah, you do not know the Guernsey French, is it ?

You did not understand! Why, sir, naturally, it was because Mr. de Quettville has the holy figure taken from her garden. For what was it but to mock him, putting the holy image up there in a shirt, for all the people to laugh at?"

The heat of indignation with which Daniel Sarchet spoke seemed to prove that de Quettville was, at least, not unpopular among his own neighbours, who, after all, would know him best. This was interesting.

"So you do not like to see Mr. de Quettville made a mock of," I said.

He stared blankly back.

"That was what you said, was it not?"

"No, sir. I said that it is not good to mock a holy image the way they have done. No good can come of it. The Mère Trouteaud there, she could tell you that, for it is the ill-fortune she has had ever since she lost him."

"But has not the figure been taken down and returned?"

"It has been taken down—yes; but not returned. Mr. de Quettville, he says it belongs to him as it came ashore on his land. He is going to set it up in his own garden, and says that any good luck it has belongs to him. But Mère Trouteaud, pulled this grand saint out of deep water; and so she has raised the *clameur* to get back."

It is curious to reflect now that I listened to Sarchet, interested indeed by coming across such an example of insular ignorance and superstition, but with one eye all the time on the old woman's condition. Certainly it would have astonished me to know how much was afterwards to result from my gossip with Daniel. For a moment I wondered whether it would be possible to disabuse him of the ludicrous conviction that this figure of Neptune was the figure of what he called a sacred saint. Not aware of the tenacity with which a peasant

in his state of isolation holds on to superstitions abandoned centuries earlier in places less remote, I did think I could bring him round to see the real truth about that old ship's figure-head. But at first I did not think it worth while; then, however, I perceived that all this, and probably future, trouble might be avoided, if only he and Mère Trouteaud had received some instruction in elementary mythology. And, foolishly, that is what I now began to give—to Daniel Sarchet at least, for Mère Trouteaud still showed no symptoms of a return to consciousness.

"Look here," I began, "you know you're quite, quite wrong about that figure. It isn't a sacred figure at all, it's a heathen image."

Sarchet blinked at me.

"Heathen?" he echoed blankly, his mouth agape.

"Yes, heathen. In fact, it's nothing but a representation of Neptune, the god of the sea."

He pondered this news for a moment, squirming meanwhile uncomfortably inside the Sunday suit that was much too big for him. Then he shook his head with decision.

"That cannot be," he said. "You have not seen him, sir, or you would not say it. Oh, in St. Pierre de Bois we do not make a mistake like that. No! See you, he *must* be a holy man, for he has a golden crown on his head, and he kneels. A heathen he cannot be, nor a god, for he kneels, you see. Wait till you see him, sir."

"I have seen many carved figures like that on ships. They make him kneeling merely because he takes up less space, and that allows the figure to be larger. Besides, I understand Mère Trouteaud's figure has the trident in his hand, and that alone proves he is Neptune."

"The trident?"

"The three-pronged fork. That is Neptune's symbol. You can always tell Neptune by that. And as for

bringing good luck—well, he doesn't seem to have brought much of that to the ship he once adorned, does he ? "

But Daniel Sarchet was not to be rushed like that !

" The three-pronged fork," he said musingly.

" Well, you can make nothing sacred of that fork at least."

" Oh, sir," he protested in a shocked voice ; " but it is a spear he holds, not a fork. A fork belongs to the Evil One. Many of the saints hold spears. One has seen them so in the windows of a church. And the crown as well as the three-pronged spear of Mère Trouteaud's saint shows that he has fought the good fight and conquered by the power of the ever Blessed Three. In the parish of St. Pierre du Bois even the children know these things."

After that I gave it up ! Possibly if the old woman had not then begun to show signs of recovery I might have gone on to the question of the ill-luck which had befallen the ship of which the supposed saint had once been the figure-head. I recall that as I attended to Mère Trouteaud I thought that on that point Daniel would have been hard put to find an explanation that squared with his illusion. But the old woman had shifted herself round and we saw that her eyes were open.

" Feeling better ? " I asked.

She regarded me steadily without so much as dropping her eyelids by way of assent. The next thing she did was to sit up, which proved that the concussion had been much less severe than it seemed. When she spoke this became certain.

" I heard some of your talk," she said slowly, disjointedly. " You are a young man still, I see." Passing a hand over her face she then asked, " What day is this? "

" Friday," I replied. " You've had a slight accident, but you're all right now."

She shook her head.

" It was last Friday they took the good man from me, and it is the ill-fortune that began that night and has not stopped since."

Coming on top of my futile efforts with Sarchet this was too much for me.

" Now look here, Mère Trouteaud," I began.

But she cut me short.

" Oh, I heard what you were saying to Daniel. That makes no difference to me. I know what I know."

" You'd better not talk much yet," I advised.

But it was advice she disregarded.

" It was on Friday night they took him, sir. Well then, see what happens next. On the Saturday my goat went dry, with nothing to account for it. On Sunday my clock falls off the wall and was broken. On Monday the chimney of my lamp burst itself. On Tuesday my baking would not rise ; on Wednesday night my dog Mimi, she is taken ill and died, and on Thursday morning I go out to find that I can draw no water for my garden from the well, for the rope is gone and the sheets I had drying on the line were lying trampled on the earth as if evil spirits had been there in the night." Mère Trouteaud, her colour heightened, paused for breath. Daniel Sarchet, looking at me, nodded wisely.

" See that now ! What did I tell you ? " he demanded.

" But that is not all," the old woman resumed. " You say there is no good in having a sacred image kneeling outside a house ? Well then, it was on Monday they took him down from the gates, and the same day people said that he had been put up in the Perigord garden. On the Tuesday I went into the garden of Mr. de Quettville to see. I waited till it was dark before going, but I took my dog Mimi with me. Oh, yes, we found that what people said was true. We found my holy figure set up on a high stone beyond reach. I showed him to Mimi

been asked I should have said that in law the figure-head belonged to my client, since it was washed ashore on his land."

"But it wasn't washed ashore. She got it among the rocks while cutting seaweed," I protested.

"That cannot be the case. By an ordinance of the Royal Court the cutting of vraic is limited to specified seasons, and this is not one."

Then I saw the cleft stick in which Mère Trouteaud found herself!

"So she can only claim the thing by admitting a contravention of the ordinance?"

"Precisely."

"And de Quettville believes she could not be guilty of such a crime, eh?"

"He—ah—*prefers* to believe that."

"Precisely," I echoed his tone; "because that enables him to retain possession of the figure-head."

Something that sounded like a chuckle followed. When, however, I remembered the poor old woman's anxiety to regain possession of her Neptune I stifled my anger and began to plead.

"Look here, this figure can't be a thing of any value; don't you think de Quettville could be induced to——"

"Sorry," he cut me short; "but the telephone isn't suitable for this sort of discussion. Better come and see me about it."

"Right. I'll come now," I said hopefully.

"No; I meant to-night. There's—there's a good deal to be said, you know." He paused as if in thought. "Look here, come and dine with me if you have nothing better to do."

It was an invitation I accepted gladly, not only in the hope that over the dinner table I could the more easily move the avocat to do something for Mère Trouteaud, but also because I had become very bored with my

solitary dinners. So that evening at the hour Le Marinel named I set out for his place.

The house in the Rue Galette, which could only be seen when one stepped inside the green door in the wall, was one of those square Guernsey houses built of the native granite. But for the smooth lawn, gay with bordering flower beds, it might have looked grim in its stark solidity. As it was, the old grey granite building made a contrast on that summer evening to the brilliant fresh green of the small lawn pleasing to the eye. On the lawn, as I entered, I saw Le Marinel stooping over a flower bed. He had evidently dressed early and come out to wait for me. At the click of the gate behind me he stood up, his black clothes and wide expanse of shirt front suddenly introducing another bit of effective colour contrast to the scene. But when he began his jerky little bird-like nods of welcome I was reminded of a magpie in the act of swallowing a worm he has just pulled out of the turf.

We had not, however, been long at dinner before I perceived that the avocat was an epicure in the matter of food. His soup was a miracle to one accustomed to the horrible concoctions English people, knowing no better, are content to accept. And for the first time I knew what red mullet could be in itself when so cooked as not to taste like a substitute for salmon. It was, in fact, the sort of dinner to which one has to give oneself, and in the process of the appreciation which I felt was due to such cooking, Mère Trouteaud, whose troubles had brought me there, dropped altogether out of my mind. Indeed it was not till the end of the dinner that I recollected the old woman, and the three-pronged "spear" of her "saint"; and then in an almost grotesque way the matter was brought back into my mind.

The maid, who moved like a shadow and had the

hands of a magician—I could not help observing her hand as she filled my glass—replaced the decanter on the shining mahogany and set a match to the little candles on the alabaster cigar-lighter. She then melted, as it were, from the room. My eyes remained on the little candles she had lighted. There were three. Idly I poised my glass of port in front of them, and through the glass saw three small golden globes of flame. The deep ruby of the wine made it look as if they were afloat in blood!

But that sight raised no premonition in my mind of the tragedy hovering over us that night. And just as little did Le Marinel appear to be affected by any sense of impending calamity. On the contrary, as the dinner progressed he had become almost jovial, the lawyer-like stiffness and formality oozing out of him, till, under the influence of his own excellent wine, he began to address me familiarly by my surname alone. The first time he did so was after a considerable pause in our talk. I had sunk into a reverie, in which Mère Trouteaud and Neptune and his three-pronged spear figured, when he broke the silence:

"I say, Dunn."

This woke me up.

"Yes?"

"You were very curious about de Quettville this morning."

"I still am. But I remember you carefully refrained from telling me anything that wasn't public property."

He laughed.

"I could tell you much more inside those limits which might interest you pathologically."

He looked inquiringly at me across the table.

"Then go ahead, Le Marinel."

But when he left his place and came round to seat himself at the corner of the table nearest me, so close

indeed that he could whisper in my ear, I wondered if, after all, he was about to tell me more than was public property about de Quettville. Anyhow, I observed that he forgot to bring his glass with him. This indication of his eagerness to speak so struck me that, mechanically, I laid down the cigar I had just cut. He in his turn noted this act.

"Better smoke," he nodded; "the story, though a comedy, will take time to tell."

Smilingly he held out the lighter for me. When the cigar was fairly going he sat up again, elbows on the table.

"On the face of it," he began, "one would have thought that the inhabitants of an isolated island would tend to be all very much like one another, with few peculiarities and little variation in character. Yet it does not work out like that. The island does look the kind of place in which, as you observed, nothing happens; and yet it is a place in which anything may happen. It may be reaction; I don't know. It may be a flaring up of the old wild Norman blood that has slept in our veins for centuries." He laughed shortly. "Interesting to the psychologist, but awkward often for the lawyer. For it is among our old families that the odd things happen. Now for the de Quettville comedy.

"First of all I must tell you that the de Quettvilles are one of the oldest families in the Channel Islands. And that, remember, is saying much. Originally they were Normans, as most of our ancient families are, Normans who did not go over with the riff-raff who accompanied the Conqueror. But that is enough about their extraction. The story opens with Hilaire de Quettville, the father of the Hilaire you saw last night. When Hiliare died he left two sons, Hilaire and Peter, and one daughter, Judith. Soon after the father's death Hiliare considered it his duty for the sake of the estate

to marry, and accordingly got engaged to a friend of his sister's, Mary Collet, a daughter of David Collet of Vazon. Although the disparity in age was great, Hilaire being over forty, yet, as she belonged to an impoverished family, the match was considered a good one for a penniless girl. However, three days before the wedding Mary Collet eloped with the younger brother, Peter. Neither was ever seen on the island again, and it was understood they had gone to America.

" Hilaire took the blow badly, though it was a blow to his pride more than his heart. Never an amiable character, he became more morose than ever; and gradually getting dropped by all his acquaintances, he devoted himself entirely to Perigord. The next blow came from his sister Judith. Life at Perigord with such a man as Hilaire, and with no one coming near the place, must have been a joyless affair, a mere existence for a young girl. She endured it for two years, though, and then ran away—ran away with Brisson."

" Brisson? Not the big man you told me of this morning? " I said.

Le Marinel nodded a rapid assent.

" With Cæsar Brisson, at that time a dashing type of commercial traveller, selling cheap Bordeaux on commission. No one knew how he contrived to scrape up an acquaintance with the girl. But I've heard that in those days Cæsar's impudence was matchless. Always well dressed and with what an inexperienced girl might take for fine manners, he could remove his hat with a flourish, place it on his heart with an exaggerated bow, show his nice teeth, or make his black eyes languish with devastating effect. But this second elopement was, of course, the direct consequence of the first, or rather of the way Hilaire took it; for by cutting himself and his young sister off from all social intercourse—and I've calculated she was only seventeen when her brother

Peter went—he deprived her of the experience which would have saved her from cheap gallantry of the Brisson type.

"Well, they say that Hilaire felt the flight of Judith more keenly than the flight of Mary Collet. That is likely, I think. For, after all, it was with another de Quettville Mary Collet fled. But that his sister should go off with Cæsar Brisson—that gave the measure of what she found life with Hilaire to be."

Le Marinel extended his hand for the wine, and then finding himself without a glass went to his former place to recover the one he had left there.

"Does this bore you?" he asked as I passed the decanter.

"I was just wondering where the comedy came in," I prevaricated. And, in fact, my thought had been that if these islanders considered all this to be comedy they must have a queer notion of tragedy. Le Marinel, sipping his wine delicately, set down the glass, nodding reassurance.

"Ah, my friend, now we arrive at the comedy. Attend! Hilaire, he is left alone in Perigord. He hates every one now, a surly, sulky man. No one calls at Perigord now. But does Hilaire then sit down and twiddle his thumbs in the chimney corner? Oh, no!"

In Le Marinel it was noticeable that under excitement the French idiom was apt to come out in his speech. This peculiarity was probably due to the fact that, like all the avocats, he had to address the Royal Court in French, and was not due, perhaps, as I then thought, to the amount of wine he had consumed.

"Ah, no!" he repeated, as if the word spelled *non*. "The ladies are no longer at Perigord in the afternoon. No, but the men they come in the evening. Not to drink tea, you understand, but to borrow money. Oh, many came for that, and there was always money to

be had—if you had good security. Yes, I think it was so that Hilaire recovered the sense of power he had lost when his bride and his brother and his sister escaped from him. So he just sat there in Perigord—yes, like an old spider in the centre of his web ; and now it is quite evident to the world how wealthy he is."

As the avocat paused to refill his glass I felt constrained to question this.

" Is it ? I saw no evidence of wealth at Perigord."

He pointed his finger at me.

" You saw no evidence of spending ; a different thing, my friend. The good Hilaire's popularity as a godfather by itself proves he is wealthy."

" His what ? " I asked, bewildered.

" Ah, you do not understand ? It is a little custom we have here. To cheer a lonely old lady or gentleman who has money but no friends, what can one do but make such a one godfather to one's own child ? And our Hilaire, who has a sense of humour of a sour sort, has quite a family of godchildren. Oh, I do not say he went to the church and took the vows for them. They excused him that. Even Drury said it was unessential, and Drury was a thoughtful St. Peter Port clergyman, whose son George was one of Hilaire's earliest godchildren, though Mrs. Blampied's Claire was not long behind. Oh, but they have been useful to Hilaire, these godchildren ! "

" Useful to him ? " I said. " Surely the intention of the thoughtful clergyman, and the rest, was that he should be useful to his godchildren."

Le Marinel gazed at me with almost comical sadness.

" My friend, it is clear you do not yet sufficiently appreciate our old Hilaire. Just consider how useful were these little ones when our old acquaintance, Cæsar Brisson, returned ! "

The mention of Brisson reawakened my interest, which would certainly have died long ago but for one fact that gradually grew more apparent to me as the night wore on, and that was the hatred Le Marinel felt for this old man, de Quettville. That did interest me, though I was careful not to allow the avocat to perceive the extent to which he was revealing that hatred. It was in this hatred I now found an explanation as to why he was so ready to talk. Love may keep us silent; hatred, like murder to which it is akin, will out.

"And why did Brisson return?" I asked.

Le Marinel shrugged.

"Who knows? Maybe he heard of the growing family of godchildren. Maybe he remembered Hilaire was now old. After all, they were brothers-in-law, and he had provided Hilaire with a niece, which is better than a godchild, or so Cæsar, who was all for reconciliation, might think. The story goes that it took six men to kick Cæsar out of Perigord when he called there; and two of them spent a month in hospital afterwards. I do not know. And I should not care to ask Cæsar. *Ma foi*, no! But his wine is good, is it not?"

He held up his glass, a little unsteadily.

"Is this his wine? It is excellent."

"Ah, Cæsar knows good wine. But yes!"

"And after he was kicked out of Perigord?"

Le Marinel needed prompting now.

"Oh, yes. He stayed on here, and opened his wine shop on the quay, calling it Perigord in honour of Hilaire. Hilaire didn't like that! But he couldn't do anything. Neither could he prevent the next blow to his family pride. As soon as Brisson learned what his brother-in-law looked like, and said, when he first saw the word *Perigord* in gilt letters above the wine shop door he thought of another stroke at his pride. And he got it home by putting his daughter to serve in the

public bar. The girl was named Judith, after her mother who had died in France."

"And wasn't she de Quettville's heir?"

"Assuredly. Cæsar pointed this out to him. Cæsar is very proud of his daughter. But Hilaire got one back on Cæsar there, for though the girl stands to inherit Perigord, Hilaire can leave his money—which could buy half a dozen Perigords—where he likes. And *that* is where the godchildren are useful to Hilaire. He flourishes them, as it were, over Cæsar's head. There, of course, Cæsar is helpless. Moreover, Hilaire can let Perigord become a ruin; and that is what he has done. Was I not right in calling it a comedy?" He laughed. "And you thought this island looked the sort of place where nothing happened! Instead of which"—he laughed again, boisterously this time—"instead of which it is the kind of place where the queerest things happen."

Mingling with his laughter I heard from somewhere in the house the rapid ringing of a bell. Le Marinel did not at first hear it. The ringing went on. I drew his attention to the bell. He cocked his head on one side, bending an ear to catch the sound. He got to his feet.

"The telephone," he said. "Excuse me one moment."

While he passed through the door I stole a glance at my watch. It was twelve minutes past eleven. I remember thinking that though Le Marinel the man liked good wine, Le Marinel the avocat had, after all, not told me one single fact about de Quettville that was not public property. And how much more he must know! He, if any, would know how de Quettville had left his money. Yet not a hint had fallen. Dislike the man as he obviously did, he had yet in essentials respected the client. At least so it seemed to me then. And I had ample time for other reflections before the avocat returned. Speculation on the outcome of the conflict between de Quettville and this Brisson chiefly interested

me. So far the honours lay with the bitter old Norman aristocrat with his sardonic humour rather than with the younger plebeian Frenchman. Brisson was proud of his girl, was he ? Well, that gave one the measure of his hatred for de Quettville. For with a truly Gallic hardness he did violence to his own personal pride in her so that he might mock de Quettville by the knowledge that his niece was serving liquor in a bar—serving liquor to drunken sailors and the riff-raff of the port.

As Le Marinel returned I got on my feet to take my leave. At first, with this in my mind, I did not take any particular note of the fact that he seemed more quiet and restrained than when he left the room. Then seeing his eyes as I offered my hand, I saw he had had a shock. He stood still, not observing my hand.

" Anything wrong ? " I felt constrained to ask.

He nodded.

" The call was from Carey, the chief constable. He tells me de Quettville has disappeared."

" Disappeared ? "

" Disappeared. In the morning Mrs. Bichard found his room empty and the study upset. She thought he had come into town on business. She is a foolish old woman. It was only when night came and he had not returned that she became uneasy. Carey is to be at the end of the road in ten minutes ; we are going out to investigate."

Again I offered my hand.

" In that case I'd better clear out."

Le Marinel, alert enough now, shook his head in a vigorous negative.

" No, you'd better come with us. If he is my client he is your patient. Carey was glad to know you were here. For it seems you were the last person who is known to have seen de Quettville."

CHAPTER IV

INVESTIGATION

THE Rue Galette was as dark and silent as the grave, and seemed almost as narrow, when we hurried towards the corner at which the car was to pick us up. Le Marinel had rapidly changed into clothes more suitable for our journey, but I had necessarily to go as I had risen from the table except for my overcoat.

Rounding a corner we saw the tunnel-like entrance to our alley all lit up by the radiance from a car's headlights; and a second or two later Le Marinel was introducing me to Colonel Carey, who sat at the wheel of the big four-seater. A sergeant of police stood on the pavement like a statue, holding the open door. The Chief Constable motioned me in beside him; Le Marinel, followed by the sergeant, jumped in behind, and the car glided quickly up the street, accelerating rapidly to take the hill out of the town. In the light of a passing street lamp I noticed the time on the dash-board clock—11.35. But soon the lamp-posts ceased to flash past us, and we were out on the country roads, running between high hedges. It was a mild, windless night, but very dark.

Not, however, till we topped the last ascent and entered on a long level stretch did Carey speak; and by that time the rush of cool air in the open car had restored my head to something like normal clarity.

"You saw Mr. de Quettville last night?" the colonel began.

"At ten-thirty, for about half an hour."

"Did you form any opinion as to his mental condition?"

"Not at the time. He was certainly very taciturn. But that I did not trouble about, since, for all I knew, it might be a natural trait, and my concern was with his general health. So my examination was confined to his physical condition."

The Chief Constable digested this in silence as we sped on.

"Doctor, you were, I understand, sent for by the housekeeper in consequence of certain peculiarities which Mr. de Quettville had developed. He had taken to his bed, refused to see the housekeeper, kept her outside the door when she tried to enter his room with food; and when she went up from time to time she heard him, as she says, raving wild talk to himself."

"These are facts I heard only to-day from Le Marinel."

"Very well; but taking them into account now, do you think it likely that they point to a mental breakdown?" As I was about to speak he continued: "This may have very serious consequences, you know. You have heard of the trick played on him by some malicious persons who set an effigy over the Perigord gateway. If any ill has happened to him in consequence it will be my business to discover who these malicious persons are. On the other hand, as de Quettville is advanced in years, and has had many troubles in his life, may this not be merely a case of senile decay?"

The colonel took his eyes off the glaring road ahead to look at me. He was, I imagine, anxious that the case would turn out to be one of senile decay. That would make no scandal, nor involve any one in serious consequence. For in that case the explanation would be that de Quettville, suffering from cerebral arteriosclerosis, had wandered off like a child and got lost. I thought it out, and the colonel had to get his eyes

back on the road long before I reached a definite conclusion. In fact, he became impatient.

"Well," he queried crisply, "what do you think?"

This time I was ready for him.

"I'd rather wait to see and hear what they have to say at Perigord, if you don't mind."

Whether he minded or not he had to accept it. The rest of the journey I used for a close consideration of such of the facts as were already known. But I did spare a moment or two to ask myself why the police were taking the disappearance so seriously. That Channel Island law was not the same as English law, and followed a different code, I knew by this time; but even so I could hardly see why they should be on the road at this hour unless—yes, unless they suspected de Quettville of some form of delusional mania with homicidal tendencies.

The car slowing down to swing through the Perigord gates roused me from my meditations. This time the open car and the brilliant head-lights permitted me a full view of the gateway, and I observed the structure with curiosity. Two massive pillars supported a sort of sham Gothic arch with a straight top, fronted by a parapet of imitation battlements, and at each end of the parapet there stood an ornamental stone vase, to finish off, as it were, the loop-holed parapet. The whole erection was, in fact, an example of eighteenth century taste at its worst; and seen in the white glare of our headlights, standing against the two great chestnut trees overtopping it from behind, it looked as if it had been cut out of cardboard. Ridiculous indeed it must have been when Mère Trouteaud's Neptune in a night-cap and a white shirt knelt on its battlemented top, holding out his trident with the three golden balls!

There was nothing pinchbeck about the house, however. A great, square, massive block it looked as

we emerged from the avenue, its dark frontage unbroken by a single lighted window. But when we swung up to the steps a woman advanced from the portico, and before we could get out she was excitedly, and with much gesticulation, addressing Colonel Carey in the Guernsey French. The others gathered round her, and as they, I suppose, naturally followed her example in using the *patois*, I had to play the part of a mere spectator, to glean what I could from their faces. But as their faces were almost as invisible as their speech was unintelligible, I soon got impatient. Then a new voice sounded behind me.

"Ah, there you are at last!" The voice came peevishly.

"Mrs. Blampied," Le Marinel breathed, and the jabber ceased.

Carey gave a little groan.

"I was just thinking you would never come," the lady went on. "Hadn't you better come inside?"

It was at once evident that Mrs. Blampied intended to take control of the situation. And she might have but for Carey. For though we followed like sheep as she led the way across the big hall and into a room beyond the staircase, we were not three minutes there before the Chief Constable took command. Mrs. Blampied, whom I now saw to be a large woman in black rustling silk, began by seating herself in a large easy-chair, and from there indicated to each of us the seat she desired us to occupy.

"Now what I would like to know——" she was beginning imperiously.

But Carey, who had ignored the pointing forefinger of her bejewelled hand and taken up his position on the hearthrug, cut her short.

"To-morrow, Mrs. Blampied, to-morrow, if you please," he said softly; "to-night we are here to ask questions, not to answer them."

Mrs. Blampied, her hard mouth still harder, eyed him as if she could not credit her hearing. But the tall, lean man with the blue eyes had the advantage; she had to look up at him while he stood there looking down at her, one hand holding the other idly behind his back. When her eyes fell to the carpet he pushed home his advantage.

"And as you, Mrs. Blampied, were not here when Mr. de Quettville disappeared, I am afraid we have not even questions for you."

"But my daughter was here," she retorted, "and I am a mother with her child's interests to look after. Every one knows Clare was his favourite godchild, and the poor girl is so dreadfully upset."

So even then the lady proposed to sit on and listen, in her child's interests, to all that passed! But here the colonel was more decided than suave. At his nod the sergeant opened the door for her. She sailed off, head in air, the colonel standing as if to attention until she passed through the door.

Then, crisply, the command came: "Call the housekeeper."

Here I became afraid I would again miss all the old woman had to say if they started off in their barbaric, insular French. But I had reason to thank Mrs. Blampied. She had led off in English, because, as I now know, she considered the island *patios* to be vulgar and unbecoming. Still, consciously or not, when Mrs. Bichard came in Carey continued in English; and in the course of her examination I was able to gather much of what I had missed on the doorstep.

No trace, I now learned, of Mr. de Quettville had been found, although the whole male population of the parish, organised by the parish constable, Peter Vaudin, had been searching over a wide area for many hours. Nor had any one been got who had seen him. She herself

had last seen him when she opened his bedroom door to show the doctor in on the Thursday night. That was last night. He had been in bed all Thursday. No, it was not the case that he had eaten nothing all day. Thursday morning when she entered his room about nine to ask if she was to bring his breakfast he almost screamed at her, telling her to leave him alone. But at one-thirty she and the parlourmaid, Alice Mauger, went up together with some lunch on a tray. He was then asleep. She put the tray on a table where he was bound to see it when he awoke. Later she went again, and found him asleep, but he had eaten some of the food. That eased her mind.

She first became uneasy when she went up once more about seven and heard him talking to himself. She opened the door softly, and looked in. She could see him lying there. He was waving his arms about; it was as if he were preaching in a church. No, she could not catch much of what he said, but he was always repeating one word: *l'épouvantail*—that meant *the scarecrow*. She then went down and sent Alice out to telephone to Monsieur Le Marinel. Yes, Alice was the only maid in the house, the kitchen-maid, Suzanne Dory, having been sent away last Saturday, because the master saw her come in laughing about the nasty figure in the shirt set over the gate. Yes, she herself did think Mr. de Quettville was referring to that figure when he used the word *l'épouvantail*. But she went to bed more easy in her mind after the doctor had gone. Even this morning when she found his room empty she was not alarmed, at least not after she had been to his study, and found the drawers of his desk open, and many papers lying about. She knew he had been having a lot of business with Mr. Le Marinel, and thought that he had risen early after his long rest, and gone to town to see him. He was certainly upset by the effigy on the

gate. It had been put up on Friday night, exactly a week ago, and it was several days before they got it down, for the big ladder belonging to them had got broken. The men could not get any one to loan another, as the people didn't like Mr. de Quettville, and lots of them came to laugh.

Here Colonel Carey who had been making rapid notes of the woman's statement, looked up and was quick to notice that the housekeeper had had enough. She, in fact, was not far from collapse.

"Thank you, Mrs. Bichard, that's all just now," he said gently.

The old woman started precipitately for the door, and then remembering her manners turned round to drop a curtsey just as Le Marinel was saying he wanted to see the study. His words arrested Mrs. Bichard.

"Well, sir," she said apologetically, "we have not yet finished tidying up."

The avocat stared at her aghast.

"Tidying up!" he cried. "Tidying up what?"

"The mess of papers in the study, sir. We had to see if——"

"Who are *we*?" Le Marinel almost thundered.

"Mrs. Blampied and myself, sir, Mrs. Blampied being very anxious to see if he had left any message to say where he had gone, or when he'd be back. I was so upset myself that I hadn't thought of that till Mrs. Blampied came here."

I heard the avocat's groan and saw Carey's wry smile.

"It probably doesn't matter," he murmured. "The case seems clear enough."

Le Marinel after a moment nodded a thoughtful assent, and turning to me said, "Would you mind, Dunn, if I had a word with Carey?"

Of course I did not mind; but the avocat did not wait for my assent—drawing Carey into a corner where

they talked together for a minute or two. I removed myself out of earshot. Presently Carey called me over.

" Dr. Dunn," he said, " we both consider that in view of the circumstances you might like to have the benefit of consultation with—er—another medical man."

His hesitancy, as well as the formality with which he spoke, suggested that he was not at all sure how the proposal would be received.

" By all means," I said heartily.

His face brightened. Le Marinel too seemed happier. And it was the avocat who hurried off, saying he would send some one to telephone for Dr. Sullivant. Whom he got, or where he went, I do not know. He rejoined Carey and myself after a few minutes. Then we all went into the study.

But at first I had no eyes for the condition of the study. I was busy wondering why Le Marinel wanted to call in another doctor. It was something new, something that had come out of Mrs. Bichard's statement. I tried to think what it could be.

CHAPTER V

THE GILT TENNIS BALL

We found the study did certainly stand in need of an hour or two's work. Indeed it looked much more likely that Mrs. Blampied and the housekeeper had been disarranging rather than rearranging its documentary contents. For it was difficult to believe that any but an insane owner, or a burglar, could have made such a complete mess. The methodical lawyer stood rigid and open mouthed, appalled at the litter. Carey, after one swift glance around, promptly crossed to the fire

and dropped on his knees on the hearthrug. From the way his head went down, and he poked about, he was searching to see if there was any trace that anything had been burnt in the fire. When he stood up a look passed between Le Marinel and himself.

"It is my duty," the lawyer said, "to demand that this room be locked and sealed before we leave." With a wave of his hand at the scattered papers, he added, "I think we ought to have Mrs. Blampied in to tell us just how much of all this is his work and how much hers."

Carey assented.

"Yes, that must be settled at once. What the deuce did they want a fire for on a night like this? That bothers me. Better have her in and ask that too."

When Le Marinel went off to find the lady the colonel glanced at me.

"Ever had any experience in this sort of thing?" he inquired.

"I don't quite know what to make of it," I replied. "If the room was left like this by de Quettville it does look like insanity."

"Ah, that's what we must talk about later. When Sullivant gets here. That fire is odd, though. He certainly never lit it when he left so early, unless he was insane. There is simply no sense in it, But I doubt if he lighted it. Come and look at this. See, the indications are that it has recently and hastily been lit; for there's small pieces of fresh coal still on the hearth, which would otherwise have been swept up. And yet this fire has certainly not been used to destroy any large amount of papers; if it had, some of the carbonised fragments must have been left, while the fresh coal lying there proves that the hearth has *not* been swept. Yet unless a large amount of paper had to be got rid of a fire was needless; a candle, or a match,

would serve for a few documents." He shook his head. "No, I'm hanged if I can make anything of it."

I followed his eyes as he began to gaze about the room from where he stood. The study was a small room, as nearly as possible square, filled with heterogeneous pieces of furniture. Under the one window stood a bright-yellow, varnished American roll-top desk, flanked by an ancient Breton armoire of black carved oak, about seven feet high, the interior of which had been fitted with drawers alphabetically labelled, and apparently, like the two large drawers forming the base, these had been used to store books and papers. Most, but not all, of these drawers stood open, and undoubtedly gave the impression of a hasty and incompleted search for some document, the exact position of which was unknown to the searcher. The fact that some of the drawers remained shut showed that the search had not been completed, but whether that was because the searcher had found what he sought, or had been disturbed before he could finish, was more than I could determine.

The room would be more accurately described as an office than a study, for books there were none; and from the incongruity of its contents it might have been taken for a store room in which a dealer in antiques kept the odds and ends of his trade. On my right as I stood inside the door a four-fold Chinese screen in red lacquer hid all but the upper half of a large oblong of silk French tapestry, depicting a hunting scene, with equestrian figures in costumes of the seventeenth century. Except for this tapestry all the walls were bare till the eye reached the fireplace, over which hung a large steel engraving of two retriever dogs by Landseer.

The fireplace had chairs on each side, one a dainty, flimsy Louis Quatorze brocade-seated chair in dull gilt, its *vis-à-vis* being a so-called easy-chair in brown

pegamoid that at once revived in me the memory of Tottenham Court Road. Over the top of the gilded French chair which stood on the side of the fireplace farthest from the door I saw a green safe, the massive doors of which stood open, a bunch of keys hanging from the one key inserted in the lock.

Swiftly as the eye can take in the major contents of a room, I had not begun to look at its less conspicuous furnishings before the avocat and Mrs. Blampied came in.

It was clear from her face that the lady had been left unaware as to why she had been summoned. Carey greeted her pleasantly.

"Ah, Mrs. Blampied, sorry to trouble you, but we have, after all, a question or two for you to answer."

He lifted the Louis Quatorze chair and set it down for her use. With tight lips and in silence, stiff with dignity, she seated herself.

"I find," he repeated, "we have one or two questions for you after all, Mrs. Blampied."

The lady bowed coldly. Carey began his questions. But not with the question I expected.

"Miss Blampied has been staying here?"

"Yes, for the last week."

"She was here, then, when that—that figure-head was put up over the gate?"

"Oh, yes. She came on Friday, the day Mr. Drury left."

"Mr. Drury is another of Mr. de Quettville's godchildren, I believe?"

"Yes, but he had been invited for a couple of days only."

"And Miss Blampied had been invited for a week?"

Mrs. Blampied shifted in her seat.

"For two weeks, one of which has gone, colonel. My daughter is his favourite godchild. She is a very intelligent

girl, and frequently helps him with his correspondence, and so on."

"Quite. And Mr. Drury when here also, I take it, helps in the same way?"

After a moment's hesitation the reply came with sneering deliberation.

"Mr. Drury, I fear, is more prone to seek help than to give it."

Carey smiled.

"Thank you, Mrs. Blampied. We may hope, then, that your daughter will help us now. Will you call her, please?"

"Call her? The poor child has been in bed for hours. She is terribly upset."

"I'm sorry I must insist, but you see, her knowledge and intelligence may be of the greatest use at this very moment."

There were further protests from the lady. Carey, however, remained adamant. Yet he stopped her just as she reached the door.

"Oh, by the way, Mrs. Blampied," he said casually, "was this fire lit when you got here to-night?"

"It was not. It was lit by my orders."

"You felt cold, I suppose, with all the anxiety. Wouldn't it have been better in your bedroom?"

"Dear me, no. It was lit here because I had enough foresight to perceive that a fire might be very necessary if Mr. de Quettville returned, or were brought home in an exhausted condition."

"Quite," Carey nodded, rather crestfallen.

"Besides," the lady added, "some one had to sit up on the chance of his return."

"Quite."

Le Marinel avoided my eye. He was amused, I fancy, at the Chief Constable's discomfiture. Carey turned with renewed briskness to us as soon as Mrs. Blampied had gone.

" Well," he remarked, " I take it that each of us is making deductions along our own line of business from the facts as they emerge. You, doctor, can I rely on it that you are noting all the facts in their medical aspect ? "

" You can," I replied confidently. " I've quite a lot to say already."

" And you, Le Marinel ? Yours is easier, eh ? Of course the lady has been vainly searching here for his will, prompted by curiosity to see what he has bequeathed to his favourite godchild."

" Why vainly ? "

" Well, his will would be in your charge, in one of those japanned boxes in your office."

" That it isn't. If he has executed a will at all I've never seen it."

Carey's eyebrows went up ; he indicated the scattered papers.

" Oh-o ! " he said. " So there *was* a motive for the methods employed ! "

The lawyer shook his head.

" Don't be so sure, Carey, don't be so sure. In the first place, would even feminine curiosity have pushed her to make such a mess of this room ? In the next, if Miss Blampied were only a half-witted assistant secretary there would have been no need for the search ; she would have known where to look. Again, Mrs. Blampied had no need of a fire except for the purpose she mentioned. Cæsar Brisson might have been glad to have a fire at his hand had *he* discovered de Quettville's will ; but a fire was no use to Mrs. Blampied since her daughter can only benefit through his testamentary dispositions, and *that* she would not wish to burn."

Carey sighed.

" Hanged if I know what to make of it," he said. " Here we are talking of de Quettville's testamentary

dispositions as if he were dead. And for all we know the man himself might walk in on us at any moment—eh, doctor ? "

" I do not think he will," I said.

Le Marinel turned his head swiftly.

" How can you know that ? " he asked, watching me.

" I merely said I do not think he will."

The Chief Constable lifted his hand, cutting in :

" All right. That means you, doctor, have got *something* out of this investigation, something positive, while our results are so far only negative."

There came then the sergeant's tap on the door. Mrs. Blampied and her daughter were shown in.

Clare Blampied was a slim, fair girl of medium height, and appeared to be in the early twenties. A pretty picture she made in the Tottenham chair, her shy, delicate face still flushed with sleep, the dressing-gown hastily wrapped round her, the two long, fair plaits framing her white throat, her feet in bedroom slippers that seemed comfortably large. Sitting so upright in the chair, a hand gripping each of its arms, she seemed, with her apprehensive eyes, rather like a child steeling itself for a scolding.

" We won't keep you long, Miss Blampied," Carey said gently, almost nervously. " But we are sure you can help us in our investigation."

Mrs. Blampied sniffed.

" Investigation indeed," she muttered. " Inquisition I would call it."

Carey fired his questions now.

" When did you last see Mr. de Quettville ? "

" Yesterday."

" You mean Thursday ? It's Saturday morning now, you know."

" Oh, yes."

"Where was he?"

"In bed."

"Tell us about it."

She took a long breath, thinking hard for a minute.

"I wanted to tell him about the ship's figure-head. Alice said Mrs. Bichard said he was hiding himself in bed because people had mocked him."

"What did you want to tell him about the ship's figure-head? He already knew about that."

"Oh, yes."

"Well?"

"Well, when the figure-head was taken down from the gate on Monday night Mr. de Quettville got the men to put it up on the old pillar by the summer-house in the garden so that nobody could get at it again. But early yesterday—I mean on Thursday—when I looked out of my window I saw the figure had fallen, and was lying in the long grass at the foot of the pillar. Then while I was dressing I saw some of Mr. de Quettville's men come and carry it away. Alice told me they had locked it up in the stable because they were sure some one had been trying to get at it so as to put it over the gate again."

"Yes," Carey encouraged her.

"I thought Mr. de Quettville might have looked out of his window after the figure had been carried off and think the people who hated him had got it again. I thought that that might be why he was staying in bed. So I went up to tell him about it."

"Do you remember when that was?"

"Just after lunch, about two perhaps. I pushed open the door so as not to awake him if he were asleep."

"And he was?"

"Oh, no! He was sitting up in bed eating his lunch, and he saw me at once."

"Did you tell him?"

" No, I had no time. He waved his hand at me, telling me to go away as he was ill."

" Did he look ill ? "

" I thought he looked dreadfully ill." The girl threw an apprehensive glance at her mother. " He was quite rude too."

" Do you remember his exact words ? "

" He almost screamed at me, ' *Va t'en, je suis malade,*' and waved me off, as if it were something infectious."

Carey spared time for a meaning glance at me. It was clear he did not think there was any need for further investigation at Perigord. It seemed conclusive that Hilaire de Quettville's mind, strained already as we knew, had given way under the dread of a repetition of the derision to which he had been publicly subjected. Carey nodded, half to himself, half to the girl, abstractedly. Mrs. Blampied rose.

" May I ask if my daughter's ordeal is over ? " she inquired coldly.

" Thank you, Miss Blampied, you have been of great help," Carey said.

But the girl hesitated on her way to the door.

" I—I found this in godfather's room to-day," she said. Thrusting a hand into the big pocket of her dressing-gown she held out a round object that shone in the lamplight. " It had rolled into a corner. I looked for the other two but couldn't find them," she explained.

What I saw, as Carey extended his hand, was a gilded tennis ball. And we knew where it had come from when he turned it over and exhibited the puncture into which one spike of Neptune's trident had penetrated.

" So he kept this in his room," Carey said when we were alone. " That tells us how the affair had stung him." He held up the shining ball delicately on three finger-tips as if he might himself be stung. Then going over to the desk he extracted a large envelope from one of the pigeon

holes and into the envelope he placed the ball, carefully as if it were as breakable as an egg. He looked up as we watched. " The only question now is : where is de Quettville ? And for the answer," he added, addressing me while sealing the envelope, " we must wait to hear what conclusion you and Dr. Sullivant come to."

Le Marinel, yawning, took out his watch.

" Another half-hour at least," he remarked.

Carey, however, filled in the time by having the study door sealed and then going to inspect the bedroom with the housekeeper, with whom he ultimately arrived at a decision as to what clothes de Quettville must have been wearing when he left the house. It took, indeed, considerably over half an hour, and much head scratching on Mrs. Bichard's part while the missing man's wardrobe was ransacked, and the various garments inspected, before a description was obtained. Then we went back to the more comfortable morning-room to wait.

I thought I now knew why Le Marinel had got the Chief Constable to call in this other doctor. If de Quettville had become insane a second medical signature would be required. But what I did not see was why his presence should be necessary in de Quettville's absence. I fancied Dr. Sullivant would not be over pleased at the summons. And if I was wrong in my surmise as to why the doctor had been called in, I was not wrong in that.

The doctor when he arrived was not in his best humour. He was a plump man of about sixty, with a good carriage, rather fleshy in the face, but with keen eyes, and a pugnacious mouth. He listened without comment while Colonel Carey detailed the situation, the interlaced fingers of his fat white hands locked round one rotund knee.

" Therefore," Carey wound up, " it seems to me that my next step must be decided by the conclusion you and

Dr. Dunn arrive at as to Mr. de Quettville's precise mental condition when he left the house."

On this Dr. Sullivant turned to eye me over, not so much appraisingly as belligerently. I had heard of his high local repute with elderly female patients, and I felt he was looking at me much as a bishop might have looked had his lordship been requested to take counsel with a choir boy.

"Well, sir, and what conclusion have you arrived at?" he inquired. The tone was not supercilious, but it certainly had a touch of kindly condescension that reminded me of a pompous examiner who had put me through it when I was a nervous youth undergoing the first professional examination at Edinburgh.

"Homicidal melancholia," I said, and not at all as I would have said it to an examiner.

His eyebrows went up.

"Really—as bad as that? Why not ephemeral mania?"

"Because, for one thing, ephemeral mania does not begin with sleep, as his did."

"Is that certain? At all events it ends in deep sleep; and he may be sleeping somewhere now. Still" —he waved a hand—"I'll have to consider that possibility. By the way, have you—er—envisaged the probability of its being a case of senile dementia? He was an old man, you know."

"There was no evidence of childish degeneration when I saw him. His will power was strong and his physical condition good."

"And you do not consider that points to some other form of mania?"

"No, he slept for hours on end."

"He certainly did," Carey intervened. "All the testimony we've had confirms that; but is it important? You've twice mentioned sleep."

Whether or no this intrusion was meant for remonstrance by the weary Chief Constable I cannot tell, but Sullivant turned on him.

"It is of decisive importance—a maniac is entirely sleepless," he almost snapped back.

This mollified me; for if Sullivant addressed me as if I were still a student, he spoke to Carey as if Carey were a schoolboy. But he hadn't done with me yet. He had seen me going about St. Peter Port bareheaded and in flannels, while he himself was upholding the dignity of the profession in frock coat and topper. And thus for a time this so-called consultation went on, each apparent symptom of mental derangement cited and debated. Finally it was agreed that de Quettville was suffering from *some* form of melancholia; but Sullivant dismissed bluntly my notion, as he called it, that the disease had advanced to the stage of homicide.

"The man," he declared, "started brooding over the insult offered him by that practical joke with the figurehead. He became self-absorbed and unhappy, exhibiting all the symptoms of melancholia in its simple form. The acute form began when he took to his bed and refused to see any one. The transition from one stage to the other is well marked. There is here even the element of delusion present, for he told Miss Blampied to go away as he was ill, an indication that his delusion was of some infectious disease. After that the next, and final, stage might have been anticipated even by a medical practitioner with no experience in mental diseases, and it came when he began to talk to himself. When Mrs. Bichard and the parlourmaid overheard him, as they put it, talking to himself, he was, of course, replying to imaginary voices."

That hit me hard. The implication, hinted at, was that I, who had seen de Quettville later than the women that night, ought to have diagnosed his condition. The

worst of it was, I then thought he was right—more right than he knew. And when I felt the eyes of both Carey and Le Marinel fixed on me, waiting for my reply, while Sullivant twiddled his fat thumbs and complacently regarded the carpet, it made one of the bitter moment in my life.

"I think you are wrong," I blurted out.

"Eh?"

The ejaculation suggested Sullivant could hardly believe his ears.

"I think it is worse than that."

"What is worse than what?"

"The man's condition is worse than you have presented it."

Sullivant passed his tongue over his lips and then smiled oddly.

"Well, let us hear why you so conclude," he said encouragingly.

"The talking to himself overheard by the housekeeper is the determining feature. I agree with you that he was in reality replying to imaginary voices."

"Good." Sullivant nodded in pretended delight. "Well?"

"Your inference was that those voices were prompting him to take his own life; I have to disagree there. In my opinion those voices were urging him to take the life of some one else. That is the secret of his disappearance—he has gone away to kill."

Carey rather jumped when he heard that.

"By George," he breathed, "that would be worse indeed!"

He stared apprehensively at Sullivant. We were all rather on edge now, except the cool little lawyer, who, lying back in his easy-chair, exhibited no sign of tension. But Sullivant reassured the Chief Constable with a wave of the hand.

"My considered conclusion is that this is a clear case of suicidal melancholia."

"And mine that it is a case of homicidal melancholia," I doggedly rejoined.

Dr. Sullivant rose to his feet as if the consultation were over.

"Ah, Youth! Youth!" he sighed, looking round for his hat, "always jumping to extremes. Here is Mr. Dunn, my young *confrère*, as an example. First, when he sees his patient he is certain there is nothing the matter with him, and now he winds up by being equally certain he is a homicidal lunatic."

Carey, however, did not smile. He looked perturbed. He had his responsibilities perhaps in mind.

"But Dr. Dunn hasn't told us why he is certain of that," he said.

"Chiefly," I said, replying to his anxious look, "it is because he had a sense of being persecuted. That feeling was roused by the practical joke with the ship's figure-head. In persons of weak will, that sort of joke might, and often has, led to suicide. But de Quettville was not weak willed; therefore, his madness followed the line of character, and led him to seek revenge, a revenge out of all proportion to the offence, once he had become insane. If the prompting had been to suicide, I should have expected him to have acted much sooner than he did."

"Because of his strength of will?" Carey asked.

"Yes."

"But, don't strong wills sometimes collapse?" he persisted.

"His did not. All the evidence we have goes to show that. His reason collapsed, not his will. His will in the end overcame the last shreds of the moral sense, and as in all such cases, his disordered brain became convinced that to kill was a duty entrusted to him."

Carey nodded gravely.

"I see," he said. "The position, then, is that you both agree as to all the earlier symptoms, but disagree as to how far the insanity developed."

Sullivant, hat in hand, turned.

"Precisely. I say, for the reasons given, it developed from simple to suicidal melancholia. As for the point made about his will-power, if de Quettville had been weak willed, he would have continued to wring his hands, as the girl said, like a person preaching, and to the end of his life complain to every one who would listen, and yet do nothing."

"Instead of which," I amended, "he sought revenge and, after a day's brooding alone, sublimated it into an act of justice."

Colonel Carey rose.

"Well," he said moodily, "if only you could have agreed, we might have known where to find him."

Sullivant nodded from the door.

"Well, Chief Constable, where do your suicides usually go?" he asked lightly.

"Oh, as you ought to know, Sullivant, it's a healthy-minded little island, this; but when a Guernseyman does go off his head he usually proves the fact by trying to throw himself off the island."

"Precisely. That's what de Quettville has done. You will find him in the sea."

With that he was gone. Carey produced a cigarette case, turning to the lawyer.

"What do you think, Le Marinel?"

But Le Marinel refused to arbitrate.

"When doctors differ——" he said, with a shrug, as he picked out a cigarette. Carey extended his case to me.

"Sullivant's a clever chap, you know," he remarked. "But in spite of that, I dare not disregard what you

say if there's the slightest chance you are right. And," he added, " if de Quettville is out for murder, the question remains · who is his man ? "

The tension seemed to have relaxed scarcely at all with Dr. Sullivant's departure.

" You have no clue, of course," Le Marinel said.

" Oh, yes, we have—that gilded tennis ball."

The avocat seemed surprised. " What can that tell you ? "

" A lot, perhaps. Tennis balls often are marked by their owners. We may find something of the sort under the gilding. The gilding too is so well done, it is possibly the work of a professional gilder. If not, we may ascertain who sold the gold leaf, for which the demand on the island must be limited. Then there's the possibility of finger-prints on the ball."

" The other two will have been handled less," I suggested.

" Yes. They won't have been touched since they were placed in position on the trident. I'm going for them now."

The Neptune had been stowed away in an outhouse, so the sergeant was sent off to get the key. Weariness and reaction were heavy on us as we loitered in the hall waiting for Sergeant Torode. Colonel Carey's idea was to establish the identity of the person responsible for sending de Quettville out of his mind. It would be lucky for that man if the Chief Constable succeeded, but I doubted not of his success, but whether he would be in time.

The dawn was at hand when we left the house and walked round the garden towards the outbuildings. In the west the sky still hung leaden and dead, but in the east it seemed to be stirring into life, for there the dead patches of cloud were edged with a tremulous, rosy fire. In the garden it was still dark, so dark that the stable

lantern carried by the sergeant threw a pool of moving light about his feet.

I was not sure Carey wasn't wasting far too valuable time in going to inspect the Neptune. For myself I was too weary to have any curiosity left. But I recall, as the sergeant put the lamp on the ground at the outhouse door and produced the key, being very sorry for Carey; he would not be able to tumble into bed when we got back to St. Peter Port. I wondered whether my own face looked as haggard, white, and drawn as Le Marinel's when Torode, throwing open the door, held up the lamp to show us inside.

The place must once have been a stable, long disused, for it smelt dank and musty. The Neptune was not hard to find. They had, in fact, set it on a large round corn bin standing against the farther wall. The sight woke me up. To tell the truth, the figure was a trifle startling. Seen in the dim light of the lantern with all the enveloping shadows, it looked at the first glance so life-like. But that was only at the first glance. A nearer approach dispelled the illusion, and one saw that the workmanship wasn't very good. Indeed, my thought was that if the ship which had carried this particular figure-head had not better work put into it, it was no wonder she had gone to the bottom.

Just then a queer strangled cry sounded behind me. Turning, I saw Carey standing with the tennis ball held up in his hand.

"Look," he cried, "look—look at the trident!"

We did look. Spiked on the trident we saw the golden balls which had been put there to deride Hilaire de Quettville. But Carey had found more than he sought. For all three balls were still on the trident.

And Carey had a fourth in his hand!

CHAPTER VI

WHERE IS DE QUETTVILLE?

WHILE he stared at the ball in his hand Colonel Carey's face took on an expression which stayed there a long time. It was a look compounded of bewilderment, wonder and irritation, and he reminded me of a small boy scratching his head over a hopeless problem in higher mathematics. The look was still on his face while Sergeant Torode began to crank up the car in the grey light of dawn. He was taking the sergeant in front on the return journey, for they had to consider the most likely methods by which de Quettville might be run to earth before he found his victim. At the moment, however, it was the fourth tennis ball that worried Carey, as was made plain when he turned to us just before Sergeant Torode got the engine to fire.

"It's unaccountable, you know. No sense in it," he growled.

Le Marinel leant forward.

"That fourth ball, you mean?"

"I do," Carey responded emphatically; "the thing has no sense in it now. I feel as if I were being mocked like de Quettville himself. They put the three balls on the trident to mock him with the pawnbroker's sign, and then just when I imagine I've got the hang of the affair this fourth one turns up to make a fool of me. Yes, exactly at the moment when we think we know all about it, a darn, silly, extra ball which has no right to be there, which has no right to exist, rolls up, and over goes my apple cart! "No," he concluded, with a shake of the head as Torode settled down

beside him, " no, there's more behind this than meets *my* eye."

But I wasn't worrying about that just then, my own eyes being almost glued up with sleep. In fact, I have a notion I went to sleep on Le Marinel's shoulder before the car passed under the Perigord gate.

Later that morning, however, my interest rekindled. By that time I had slept for four hours, had a bath and begun a leisurely breakfast after receiving the welcome news that in my absence no professional calls had come for me. It was Saturday morning, a fine bright morning too, with the air coming in sweet and cool through the open windows, bringing with it the murmur of voices. the voices of people passing down the Grange on their way to market. But there was no excitement in those voices. None that I could detect even when I went over to the window to listen. And excitement there must have been if in the night Hilaire de Quettville had found his enemy. Such news would go round an island like wildfire.

At the corner of Upland Road, just under the Grange Club windows, a horsey-looking man in gaiters with a bored-looking brindle bulldog squatting at his feet, stood idly watching the passing people. But he looked as bored as the dog. And as he seemed the type who would know the latest news, it was safe to infer one of two things: either de Quettville had not yet got his man, or Carey had got de Quettville before murder had been done. So far so good. I went back to finish my breakfast with an easy mind.

The forenoon I had to spend on a round of visits to patients. More or less perfunctory these visits were, for patients, unless very ill indeed, do not take kindly to a locum, especially a young one. Still, though not one of those dear old ladies I saw was really ill, it became a matter of more than duty to look after them, simply

because they were another man's patients. But getting back about one, I did not sit down to lunch till I had rung up the Chief Constable's office for news. Carey, I learned was not at the office, and the man who took my call was pretty short when I asked if they had found de Quettville. That made me peremptory, and I reminded him that de Quetville was my patient. Le Marinel had stressed that fact the previous night, and though I had relieved myself of any responsibility for what de Quettville might do by giving my opinion as to his condition, I was all the same mighty curious to know how Carey had got on in his efforts to trace him, and the persons he judged to be responsible for the man's mental collapse.

Ultimately, after much hesitation, the official at the office said he would call the sergeant. Luckily the sergeant proved to be Torode, and he did not haggle in his replies to my questions. Not that there was much news to give. They had not got their man yet, but he was very confident they would. Every available officer was out on the hunt. In fact, it was rather surprising they had not already laid him by the heels.

"But you see, sir," Torode added, "we're bound to get him, for our men are passing the island through a sieve, as you might say."

"And Colonel Carey, is he on the job now?"

"The chief hasn't been off it since last night, not for more than his meals, that is." The question seemed to astonish Torode.

"Where is he?" I inquired, thinking I could guess something if I knew.

"Oh, here one minute and anywhere the next."

"Do you happen to know where Mr. Le Marinel may be?"

Torode responded to this question with bright alacrity.

"Yes, sir, I can tell you that. Mr. Le Marinel is at Perigord going through those papers in the study."

And that was about all I could learn. But the sergeant promised to ring me up as soon as anything definite came in. He was quite aware, he said, that I should have to see de Quettville professionally the moment they got him.

That kept me quiet for an hour or two. But, getting no call by five o'clock I rang up again, only to be told that the segeant was out on urgent duty. The worst of it was I felt tied up to the house, being certain, in the way one is on such occasions, that the call from the office would come the moment I left. About six, when I was mooning restlessly around my room I chanced to look out of the window and saw two men with their heads together reading something in a newspaper. Seeing other men emerge from the club to catch the shouting newsboy as he passed, I dashed downstairs to collar the lad as he came away. There was, it seemed, something in that paper of unusual interest. And when I unfolded the sheet this is what I found:

STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

Considerable anxiety is being felt over the reported disappearance of Mr. Hilaire de Quettville of Perigord. It is learned that Mr. de Quettville left his residence Thursday night or Friday morning without notice to his household and under peculiar circumstances. Although it is known Mr. de Quettville did not leave the island, he has not since been seen. Prior to his disappearance Mr. de Quettville was confined to bed and under medical treatment. It is thought that he may possibly be suffering from a temporary loss of memory.

I read the paragraph through more than once before starting to think it over. The suggestion as to a

temporary loss of memory was nonsense. Had that been the fact, de Quettville would have been found wandering aimlessly, long ago, especially on such a circumscribed area. The island had been almost sifted to catch him, and since he had not been found it was clear he must be concealing himself, concealing himself till he had achieved his purpose, with all the astuteness and craft peculiar to the delusional homicidal lunatic.

It would be idle to pretend that this knowledge left me untouched. As the paragraph stated, the man had been under medical treatment. That might make things ugly for me later on. Ought I to have recognised his condition, or at any rate to have foreseen that night what it might become? With the thought of my responsibility to Dr. Wright, whose patient de Quettville was, my qualms increased to such a degree that about eight I put on my hat and went down to the Chief Constable's office.

Sergeant Torode was back again at the counter, alone. He looked up, almost, as I thought, guiltily, to tell me the Chief was still out.

"Any news?" I asked.

"No, sir, none."

"Ah!" I breathed in a way he did not like.

"Our view now is that it may be a case of accident or—or suicide," he ventured.

"Nonsense."

"Well, sir," he protested plaintively, "what else can we think? We've practically combed the island for him, and even if he'd been in bits we'd ought to have got some of the pieces somewhere by now."

"That disposes of the accident theory, doesn't it?"

"More or less," he was compelled to agree. "I think it must be suicide myself; but whatever it is we're quite certain he is dead."

Dead? Standing there at the counter I examined

the possibilities. If only I could be quite certain of that!

Dead and harmless. That was what Sullivant maintained—dead by his own hand. Mrs. Blampied, too, I remembered, seemed to have made up her mind last night he was dead. She had spoken of being there to protect her daughter's interests. But what could she know? With her the wish was father to the thought. She had the man's death in her mind as far back as the day on which she made him a godfather in her daughter's interests. And with the local police was the position not the same? They wanted the man to be dead. For from my experience I knew that nothing gives the police graver anxiety than the news of an escaped homicidal lunatic. In a murder case the crime is committed before the police know, but when a homicidal maniac gets loose it is equivalent to a notice that murder is about to take place. And when I recalled de Quettville as I had seen him in bed, his truculent rudeness with me, and his really, for his years, excellent physical condition, I remained convinced his could not be a case of melancholia with suicidal tendencies. Having reached this unwelcome conclusion I looked up to find Torode watching me.

"Sergeant," I said, "you know the man; does he seem the sort to commit suicide?"

Torode rubbed his chin with slow thoughtfulness.

"I know about him," he began. "All the island does. I wouldn't have said he was that sort. No, I wouldn't have said that. Tough stuff he is. Has been all his life, as I've heard. Not the soft spongy sort that takes to the water, not him. Still, there it is."

But my own theory had strengthened. By this time it had strengthened into a conviction. I was certain that de Quettville, finding his victim away from home, possibly absent from the island, had gone into hiding

to await his return. If this were right, then it became immensely important that the interval thus made available should be used for identifying the person or persons responsible for his mental collapse, so that they might be warned and saved from the insane fury their practical joke had set loose.

"Has anything been done about those tennis balls?" I inquired.

"Why, yes, of course, sir, everything possible."

"For instance?" I insisted.

Torode's eyelids lifted ever so slightly, while he hesitated.

"Well, we've ascertained the gilding wasn't done locally, nor the gold leaf sold here neither. We stripped two of the balls, after taking the finger-prints, that is, and underneath we found just the usual marking on them."

"Nothing else?"

"No, sir; nothing else, just what's stamped on most balls of the kind the maker's name and the date of manufacture."

"And what about the finger-prints?"

"Oh, we got them all right. But it'll take time before they come in. You see, we've got no finger-print register here, and if we had it would be no good, for the parties responsible couldn't be of the criminal classes, could they?"

To me it seemed that no real progress had been made. But the sergeant did not appear to share my disappointment.

"And Mr. Le Marinel," I asked, "has he made anything of those papers?"

Torode, leaning against the counter, shook his head.

"Not that I've heard. But there were so many papers, I dare say it'll take time to go through them all, won't it, sir?"

Just then the shadow of a suspicion crossed my mind that Torode knew more than he was telling me. The suspicion, I fancy, had its origin in his easy attitude and confident manner, which were certainly not justified by anything he had told me. What was he keeping up his sleeve? An odd feeling that I was being shouldered out of the case came to me. As I tried to read confirmation on the sergeant's face he smiled back at me.

"I wouldn't worry, sir, if I was you," he said confidentially. "Leave that to us. Nearly every case begins with a mussy little lot of odds and ends we collect. At first you can't tell what's important from what isn't. But you find afterwards that the bits that matter fit in together, and what is junk just drops away. Yes"—he nodded thoughtfully—"and as often as not you discover that what at first you took to be a find is junk really, and what you took to be junk is actually glittering gold."

Just as I was getting bored with Sergeant Torode's philosophic dissertation on the difference between appearance and reality, the door softly opened, and Le Marinel stepped inside. From where he stood with the door knob in his hand he took us both in.

"Evening, doctor," he greeted me, nodding in his snappy, bird-like fashion. His eyes went to Torode. "Ah, sergeant, Chief still out, is he?"

"He is, sir. Can I take down any message?" The sergeant spoke briskly, getting a hand to the pencil behind his ear. Le Marinel hesitated, his dark eyes wandering to me. The feeling of being an intruder leapt up in me.

"N-o," the avocat replied. "No, it will keep. I'll see him later."

I was already on the way to the exit. But the little lawyer for some reason did not accept the chance I was

so hurriedly offering, and came out with me. We walked in silence through the courtyard towards the arched entrance into the street.

"Those papers are in an infernal mess," he said, with a sigh.

"Isn't it a lovely night, even for the time of the year?" I remarked.

He half-stopped to stare at me.

"I was remarking on the state of the Perigord documents," he said.

"And I was remarking about the state of the weather," I returned.

He whistled.

"Ah! Something got you on the raw, eh? I'm sorry. What is it?"

"Well, to be frank," I said, "you gave me the impression just now that you would have said more if you had not found me there."

"Surely not," he protested, taken aback by this directness.

"More than that, I have a suspicion the sergeant knew more than he told me."

"Very likely. He probably knows more than I do, since he is Carey's confidential man."

He was moving on again, but I laid a firm hand on his arm.

"Look here," I said, "you are seeing Colonel Carey later; will you remind him from me that as this man's medical attendant I have more concern with him than the Chief Constable, at least till a crime is committed."

"You mean that?" Le Marinel cried.

"I mean more. As de Quettville's doctor my responsibility is graver than your own, since my concern is with the man himself while yours is only with his property."

That got Le Marinel himself on the raw. He was so

upset his eyes fairly goggled in their sockets. I was walking away, leaving him stationary under the archway, and looking very like an astonished little gold fish; but he stepped after me, grabbing my arm.

"Stop," he whispered. "Stop, I beg you. You are under a misapprehension—so far as concerns myself at least, for there is nothing I need conceal from you."

The rapid, eager fashion in which he whispered all this gave it a confidential kind of air, and it was natural that I should draw back under the arch, and away from the crowded street. Dusk was then deepening, windows were getting lit, and under the low, deep arch with the house above fronting the street, was one long shadow.

"Go ahead then," I said.

The little lawyer gave a sigh of self-pity.

"More trouble for me. And more to follow now that Brisson is back, and Mrs. Blampied and the others out for the pickings."

"What's that about Brisson?"

"Ah, yes, I remember Cæsar did interest you. Well, the good Cæsar, it appears, has been away, for I saw him coming from the boat at five. And I fancy when he hears the news I'll see him soon at Perigord. And who am I to keep the peace between Madame Blampied and Cæsar Brisson? And Cæsar is no gentleman, mark you."

"Never mind about them," I said; "it's the search for de Quettville I want."

"Oh, well, what exactly did Torode tell you?"

He nodded away as I recounted the substance of what the sergeant had said.

"Well," he began when I had finished, "this is the position at the moment. Torode told you the Chief had got finger-prints on the tennis ball; what he did not

tell you is that the Chief, acting on information I obtained at Perigord from the papers, is busy collecting the finger-prints of various people to whom de Quettville had made large financial advances. Carey is very adroit, and is getting prints from people who don't know they are giving them, as for instance with Major Murphy, whose glass he stole while having a drink with him. But the women aren't so easy to get."

"The women," I interjected. "Does he think there's women in it?"

"He doesn't think it, he knows there is a woman in it. Deep in it too. It is obvious that those three balls could not be stuck on the trident without handling. At any rate the people who fixed them wouldn't bother about removing their finger-prints afterwards. They would not think of finger-prints at all. Well, on two of the balls found on the trident, the prints were those of a woman."

"And the third?"

"The same woman, *and* a man's also. Undoubtedly a man's. I've seen them. But notice this: the two bearing the woman's imprints had no other prints, while the third ball with the man's had *also* the woman's."

"But there was a fourth ball," I reminded him.

"Yes, and the Chief has established a connection between it and the others, for the fourth ball has the imprints of two different women on it."

"One Miss Blampied's, of course."

"Exactly, and the others are those of the same female imprints which appear on all four. But here comes the snag. I have supplied Carey with the names of all those I could get who owed de Quettville money; but not one is a woman. Therefore, the woman is in some way connected with one of the men who are his debtors, and whose names I supplied—but whether as

wife, mother, sister, aunt, grandmother or what not "—Le Marinel shrugged—" who is to say ? "

" It was probably this woman who did the gilding."

" Probably, since they know now the job wasn't done by any local firm. And that woman fixed on two of the balls while he was fumbling over one, and then she finished his job herself. Oh, yes, the indications of fumbling are plain enough. She clearly helped him with the third."

" Has Carey formed any theory as to why there was a fourth ball ? " I asked, remembering the Chief's perturbation when he discovered there was a fourth ball.

" No. He guesses they may have had a fourth in case one got lost. The jest would, of course, have no point had there been only two balls on the trident. It would not have suggested the pawnbroker. So they may have got one ready as reserve. But that would not explain how it came to be in de Quettville's possession. That mystery remains a mystery. Carey is content at the moment to leave it so. But another line of investigation lay through the shops in the town which sell tennis balls, and deal in this make of tennis ball. We know from their condition the balls were new, and have never been used for the game. So they were probably bought for this one purpose by people who do not play tennis, since if they did they would have put old used balls on the thing. How easy to find out who has recently bought, say, half a dozen, and then if we found that that person's name figured among de Quettville's debtors, why, our search was virtually over. But as a matter of fact we found no dealer who had recently sold any of this particular make and date. The conclusion then was that the balls had come from England. Carey tried the post office. Half a dozen balls would come in a special box with the dealer's label attached, and it might well take the postmen's eye.

But here again he drew a blank. Most of the postmen agreed they would notice such a box ; but, unfortunately, not one remembered having carried such a box on his rounds."

All this did interest me. It was not what I expected to hear, but at the moment I was taken with the fascination which the solution of a difficult problem provides.

" Has the Neptune itself been examined ? " I asked.

" Of course. But Carey got little there. The figure, you know, was decked out in a shirt and even had there been a hundred imprints they would have got rubbed out by that fluttering garment. Besides, it had been handled several times by de Quettville's own men."

" Does Carey do this finger-print business himself ? That's unusual for a chief constable, surely ? " I said.

" Carey spent most of his life in India, in the police, and what he doesn't know about finger-prints isn't knowledge. In India the police use people's finger-prints as a substitute for their signatures, in preference to it, in fact, since you cannot forge a finger-print. But I forgot to tell you one thing he learnt from the Neptune. You remember the beard had first been painted white the better to suggest de Quettville ? Well, Carey found out that the white paint used came from an artist's colour tube ; it was, in fact, what is called Chinese white. That suggests some one who, at least, dabbles in painting."

" Especially, when taken with the gilding."

This looked hopeful.

" Oh, Carey will find them," he added with conviction.

In this I was glad to concur.

" Yes, it looks as if he may save them yet."

The avocat showed surprise.

" Save them—save who ? " he inquired, staring.

" Why, the person or people responsible for sending the man off his head."

The bewilderment in the avocat's eyes passed away, being replaced by a look of extreme discomfort.

" Well," he said hesitatingly, " Carey, of course, wants to know who they are ; but he no longer regards them as standing in any danger from de Quettville."

I could hardly believe my ears.

" Is that really true ? " I heard myself asking. " Why does he now think that ? "

" Because he is now sure de Quettville is dead."

" He is sure of that on what grounds ? "

" Because he has not been found. And that being the fact he is now convinced Sullivant's theory of suicide was right. No other theory fits the facts."

" He will find he is mistaken. But I have said what I think, and hold myself free of responsibility for the consequences."

" Well, as to that," Le Marinel said slowly, " Carey has seen Sullivant again, and I'm afraid they both consider you in some degree responsible. It is thought that when you saw de Quettville on Thursday night you might have diagnosed his mental condition. Sullivant considers the melancholia must have developed from the simple to the acute form by then. But he was most sympathetic about it and, of course, does not blame you in the least."

Le Marinel must have misread my face as he said this, for he hastened to add in an off-hand fashion, " After all, my dear fellow, what does your mistake matter ? The man is better dead on all accounts, his own not least."

He was startled when I threw off the hand he laid consolingly on my arm.

" Le Marinel," I cried, " the man I saw that night is

alive. He left his house bent not on self-destruction but murder."

Le Marinel, mortified, I suppose, by my fierce rejection of his unwanted sympathy, looked at me with a sudden flush on his face, anger in his eyes.

"Very well," he said, "if he is alive, why don't you find him? After all, it was you who let him loose."

He can hardly have meant what he said. But in the heat of the moment I took up his challenge.

"All right," I said. "I'll find him—somehow."

The avocat laughed.

CHAPTER VII

THE TWO MEN IN THE WINE SHOP

As I turned away with Le Martinel's subdued laughter behind me it is the bare truth to say I had not the slightest notion as to how de Quettville could be found. Yet on the spur of the moment, being hot and sore with the treatment I received, I had pledged myself to find him. And the avocat's laughter, not so much the amusement as the mockery and pity I seemed to detect in it, simply strengthened my resolution. So I turned my back on him, and marched off down the Pollet much as if I already knew where to put my hand on de Quettville within the next half-hour.

I did not, however, walk far along the narrow street before the rashness of my self-appointed task began to strike me, and pulling up beside a shop window gay with cigar boxes and bottles of local perfumery, I perceived that Le Marinel's amusement was not unjustified. For where the local police, with all their resources, authority and knowledge of the island, had failed, how should I, alone and a stranger, hope to succeed? Yet I remained unshaken in my conviction

that the man had not taken his own life. Nothing I had seen and nothing I had heard about him lent the least support to Sullivant's opinion. A man mentally unhinged, possessing similar virility of will-power as I had witnessed, seeks refuge not in self-destruction but in revenge. Apart from that, it seemed absurd to suppose a man of such a hard, cold nature could be driven to suicide by any insult, much less by a ridiculous trick played with a derelict ship's figure-head.

Emerging from the Pollet I crossed the road behind a tram car and took the upper promenade of the breakwater which stretches out to sea like a gigantic finger. And though, while I walked on, I kept calling myself an ass, it was not because I became shaken in my belief about de Quettville, but simply because I had so rashly undertaken to find him. I reached the end of that far-flung breakwater before the least glimmer came as to how he might be found. So I jumped on to the parapet, and sat there to think it out. It was a good place for thought.

Far below me in the dark the flood tide rippled in whispers against the base of the granite breakwater. Fronting me over the inner harbour rose the terraced town, its host of lighted windows reflected like stars arranged in rows on the smooth velvet blackness of the water. From somewhere alongside some quay the fussy rattle of a ship's derrick loading or unloading cargo came, and an occasional cry from a directing stevedore, but too distantly to disturb my thoughts. And to sit perched out there at the extremity of the sea wall gave me, too, the sensation of detachment, so that I felt able to view the island, as it were, objectively, and at a helpful distance.

At first, however, this produced little. To be quite satisfied that the man was somewhere on what, from where I sat swinging my feet, seemed a small enough

island, was one thing ; to find him on it was quite another thing. I started, however, with the knowledge that he had not left the island. Sergeant Torode had satisfied himself on that point. It was impossible, he asserted, that a man so well known, and so distinctive in appearance, could have left by either of the English mail boats without being recognised a dozen times over. And he brushed aside the suggestion that de Quettville might have left in a fishing boat from one of the places round the coast. None of those boats needed to go far, none of them remained out for long ; and while Torode admitted the man might in his insanity have gone off by himself in a rowing boat, the fact that no rowing boat had been reported missing, as it very quickly would have been by its owner, disposed of any such theory. It was, indeed, the impossibility of leaving the island unrecognised, coupled with the fact that he could nowhere be found upon it that had in the interval forced the police to accept Dr. Sullivant's theory of suicide. But this theory I rejected. And if I were right, de Quettville was still somewhere on that island. But where ?

My eyes wandered along the stretch of coast, visible as a great hump of black shadow, from where the square tower of St. Barnabas cut an elongated wedge in the skyline right along and beyond the range of lighted houses and hotels to the fretted coast near St. Sampson's harbour. Far away in the north where lights were few, I noticed what looked like a small but brilliantly lit window moving rapidly along the shore. The next moment I knew it for what it was ; a tram on the St. Sampson—St. Peter Port line. Almost idly I watched the little blob of light twisting and turning as it followed the swerving coast-line, seeing it grow larger the nearer it came. But not till its speed slackened, and it began to mix itself with the lighted windows of the town, did the hint I needed come to me.

Slowly the tram crawled along the quay like some luminous beetle, and in its very slowness there was a suggestion of an advance that must be stealthy because of some enemy lurking ahead. When some irregularity of the cobbled street, or a worn joint in the rail, sent the lights jumping with the concussion, it looked so like a succession of frightened shivers that the fancy made me smile. But a quick thought struck the smile away. I sat up.

Cæsar Brisson! Was it not on that same quay that Cæsar Brisson had his wine shop? A flurry of hitherto unassociated facts jumped into my mind. Cæsar Brisson had called his shop Perigord, and Le Marinel had told me how that insult angered de Quettville. Could Brisson be the author of this latest insult with the Neptune, which was supposed to have driven de Quettville to suicide? There was certainly a Gallic flavour in its mockery. And had not Le Marinel just told me he had seen Brisson coming from the boat?

I jumped from the parapet, startled by perceiving that if the insane de Quettville was out to murder any one the most likely of all would be his detested brother-in-law. And from this it followed that Perigord was the most likely place to find de Quettville; the Perigord on the quay, that is. Indeed, when I recalled, as I then did with hasty apprehension, the almost devilish cunning with which a homicidal maniac can bide his time and make and take his chance, it was highly probable that de Quettville was even at that moment hanging around among the shadows of the ill-lit quay, watching the wine shop.

I ran the whole length of the deserted promenade, slackening down only when I reached the end, near the foot of St. Julian's Avenue. Then I turned to the left by the Careening Hard at a more sober pace.

The exact position of the wine shop I did not know;

but I remembered Le Marinel saying it was on the quay, and as the quay had but a single line of houses fronting the inner harbour I knew the shop would be easy to find. And so it proved. Indeed, to miss it one would need to have been both deaf and blind, for the voices of its clientèle were audible long before one reached its well-lit front with the word " Perigord " displayed in large gilt letters above the door.

Before entering I sauntered past to have a look at the surroundings. The houses facing the quay were chiefly used as marine stores, offices and ship's chandleries ; but behind these there appeared to be a perfect rookery of tenements with flights of steps and foot passages giving access to the High Street above. Few people were about in that quarter, but among the twists and turns of those labyrinthine passages one might pass perhaps fifty men and never see one, had they cared to remain in the shadowed corners.

Most of the men who went to the wine shop seemed to use the steps that led down from the High Street, and twice hearing footsteps I stood aside in an angle of the passage wall, to find not only that I remained unobserved myself, but that it was barely possible to tell whether the dim figure which slipped past me were man or woman. The place was just made for murder. One forward thrust, and a knife would go between a man's ribs and he be unaware that there was more than a knife there in the darkness.

With this perception came a quick distaste for the place ; and so easily could I imagine the maniacal old man lurking there to get Brisson on his way home, that, to be quite frank, I turned and ran helter-skelter for the wine shop.

My horror, however, passed as soon as I emerged on to the quay. After a breath or two I was able to enter the Perigord with a fair imitation of being at my ease.

The shop held a large number of customers that night, but, divided up as the men were, some in groups standing about the bar, and others seated at the small round tables placed in front of forms which backed the wall, it did not seem crowded.

Following my unobtrusive entrance I was left standing at the bar unnoticed for some time. The wine shop had a length perhaps four or five times greater than its breadth, and at the far end the white shirt-sleeved proprietor himself stood behind the bar, conversing to a group of his patrons. That this was Brisson himself, Le Marinel's description left no doubt. The only other attendant, also in shirt sleeves, but with an apron tied round his slim waist, had his back towards me, while drawing some liquor from a bin against the wall.

A pleasant place the Perigord certainly was, as unlike anything in England as could be imagined, with nothing about it that was meretricious or gaudy, not even a mirror. Behind the bar, on a low shelf, resting on their sides and showing their round varnished ends, there was a long range of over twenty great wine casks, each with a shining brass tap, and each with a white china plate on the shelf underneath to catch any drip.

Above these great barrels several tiers of bottles rose to the roof, some racks filled with bottles in straw, others lying on their sides so that their corks showed like rows of coins. The upper racks were filled with wire-topped bottles standing upright, and the parti-coloured labels suggested soldiers toeing a line.

But it was the serried ends of those mighty barrels that gave the wine shop its atmosphere of dignity and solidity. That they were permanent fixtures was obvious, not only from the fact that they were in a highly polished condition, but also because they projected through the wall from some apartment behind, from which it seemed

they would have to be replenished. Then just as I was speculating on this operation a call came:

"Catulle!"

It was a big, pervading voice that sounded through all the lesser chatter of the wine shop. Turning, I saw the call came from Brisson, and from the nod in my direction that followed, I perceived it was meant to draw the other man's attention to the fact that I had stood there too long neglected. The fellow, who must have already seen me while I was glancing about, turned, as I thought, with some hesitation, to look at me. At once I recognised him. He was the same rat-nosed man I had seen in the Rue Galette on Thursday morning. Instead, however, of coming to serve me, he went away up the bar to speak to the proprietor. Brisson, I fancy, shared my surprise at this action. A brief exchange of words followed between the pair, and then Brisson himself came along to serve me.

Now, though I had come there to seek traces of de Quettville, and with the half-formulated intention of giving this man warning of the danger threatening him, I was disappointed not to have a closer look at the man who appeared unwilling to face me. That he knew me seemed now fairly certain, but for the life of me I could not place him. And though I had come across many a queer type both in hospital and during my service as police surgeon, this chap ought to have been unforgettable. Brisson approached, lifting his eyebrows interrogatively.

"A cognac," I replied.

He inclined his head, stepped round to bend swiftly and pluck a bottle from the low shelf under one of the gigantic casks. For all he was so huge a fellow the whole series of actions reminded me of a cat plucking a mouse from its hole. With a twist of the wrist he exhibited to me the Otard Dupuy label.

"You will find this good," he said with a smile of great frankness, as he picked out a glass blindly from beneath the counter and set it before me. All his actions were carried through with swiftness and precision, and yet with a marked economy of effort. In a second my glass was filled and the syphon set to my hand, the bottle being whisked upward as the last drop fell. My eyes were on his dexterous fingers and I noticed they were covered near the knuckles with short, black hairs. Yes, his finger-tips were certainly too broad to be other than those of a man of huge physique, and I might have said Torode had no need to look further to find the man responsible for hoisting the Neptune on the Perigord gate. But there was this against it: Cæsar Brisson was too deft fingered to need the assistance of any woman in fixing those tennis balls on the trident. That I recognised while lifting the glass to my lips.

"It is good," I said with emphasis.

He showed his fine teeth in a smile as he bowed in his exaggerated French fashion.

"The appreciation of a connoisseur, that is very pleasing to me," he said, patting the bottle before replacing it. "It is not to every one I offer this, you comprehend."

Then I took, so to speak, the bull by the horns.

"That man of yours," I remarked, laughing, "seemed to think me unworthy of any kind of drink."

"That man of mine?" he repeated, staring at me with wrinkled forehead.

"Yes, that fellow who kept me waiting. Catulle, I think you called him."

"Oh, yes. Ah, poor Catulle, he is nervous about his English, you understand. It is so bad, and he saw you were English. Yes, Catulle, he is so sensitive, poor fellow, and—oh, his English, it is so funny!"

Brisson threw back his head and laughed noiselessly and confidentially.

"You haven't had him long, then?"

"Ah, but he is my friend, not my servant, the good Catulle."

After a moment's thought, I said, looking along the bar at the good Catulle wiping a glass:

"Well, you know I have an impression I've seen him before."

"So?"

"But I'm hanged if I can place him."

Brisson was interested.

"Perhaps his name and his occupation will be of assistance to you. His name, it is Catulle Coquard, and he is a wine traveller from Bordeaux, now having, you comprehend, a leetle holiday with his old friend of the road, Cæsar Brisson. That helps—*hein*?"

I shook my head as he stared at me hopefully.

"I must have been mistaken, that's all. But it's of no consequence," I added as Brisson moved away, as I thought at first to call Coquard, but actually to attend to some other customers.

I took out my pipe and with slow deliberation filled it, my thoughts now working on the problem of how to broach the matter of de Quettville to Brisson. The man must be warned. But the duty called for considerable tact, since the warning could be given only on the assumption that he was believed to be concerned in the setting up of the Neptune over the Perigord gateway; implicated, that is, in the outrage which had driven his brother-in-law mad.

That Brisson already knew of de Quettville's disappearance it was impossible to doubt, for even if he did not read one or other of the local newspapers there were dozens of men coming in and out of the wine shop every hour, and I had myself overheard the affair referred to by more than one bystander, although I observed that they did so in lowered tones when the

proprietor happened to be within earshot. Then it occurred to me that I could best broach the matter through Coquard. Perhaps I was swayed towards this opinion by my desire to hear Coquard's voice. Anyhow, it was not now difficult to attract his attention, for he glanced my way frequently after Brisson's talk with me. So when I caught him at it and signalled, he being otherwise unoccupied, strolled towards me, manipulating a tooth-pick, his hairless face rather twisted and contorted by his efforts, as one had to suppose, to reach a back tooth. And all the notice he took of my order till those efforts were crowned with success, was to stand and stare at me out of his screwed up little pig's eyes, a stare curiously malicious and penetrative.

Now in my profession there is one quality which must be acquired if it is not born with a man, and that quality is coolness. So though the fellow's insolence was deliberate, I merely looked him up and down slowly, inwardly wondering as to the cause of the antipathy I divined in him. To the first impression he gave me in the Rue Galette there was little to add except that now, seeing him move, he seemed boneless ; and his thinness somehow suggested—it sounds absurd—that his bones had been replaced by springs, for whatever his stamina, he stood upright and was obviously active and muscular.

I badly wanted to kick him for his cheek, and imagined that indiarubber-like body swaying away from the impact of a vigorous boot ; but it would never do to get involved in a brawl in such a place. Besides, there was the counter between us. But it was he who gave me the surprise.

" I haf seen you before," he nodded at me, replacing his tooth-pick in a vest pocket.

" Really ? Where was that ? "

" With that *trompe*, zee ozzer morning."

" *Trompe ?* " I repeated wonderingly. The word

stirred forgotten memories in me, memories of the Rue Jacob when I studied at the Saltpêtrière. In those days we had a familiarity with the thieves' jargon only equalled, I suppose, by the Paris police. It was the fashion for students to talk in the *argot* of the thieves. So I was just wondering how this wine traveller from Bordeaux knew the meaning of the word when he explained it, at the same time impatiently calling me a fool in another *argot* word.

" *Gonjou*, a lawyer. I see you with that lawyer in the Rue Galette, and I know you haf not come here for to drink, eh ? "

" No. As a matter of fact I came here to look for some one."

A sly smirk overspread the hairless face, and his eyes narrowed so that he looked at me through mere slits.

" Ah, then you are a *robeau*—a policeman," he whispered huskily.

This was better still. I felt that it would be easy soon to tell his very age and the period at which he had lived in Paris from his vocabulary ; for in Paris not even the fashions in women's hats change so rapidly as the fashion in thieves' *argot*, and, naturally, the slang word for a policeman alters most frequently. In my time *robeau* was the word in fashion when *chardonneret* became *démodé*. All this flashed through my mind as I replied to Coquard.

" No, I am a doctor, looking for a patient who is "—I was about to use the argot equivalent to the English " off his rocker," but checked myself in time—" who is . . ." With a forefinger I tapped my head significantly.

Coquard understood and it pleased him that he did. He snapped his fingers.

" Ah, yais ! I know what you mean ; you seek for one who is of a mentality not very O.K."

" Yes," I agreed, " one who is of a mentality not very O.K."

He opened his eyes to their widest.

" So you come to seek him *here* ! " He shook his head sorrowfully. " Ah, monsieur, it is not very *chic*, that ! "

Coquard was laughing at me, of course.

" Well, you know," I said, " I have a reason for thinking he may be here."

" Ah, *vous avez raison* ! Like ze cat after ze mouse, you know where to look, *hein* ? Now I begin to, what you call it ?—smell a cat," he cried, rubbing his nose and looking around for an audience who could enjoy the joke.

" *Vous avez le bec propre*," I laughed, jeering in my turn.

He stared back at me stupefied, his finger still held at the side of his long thin nose. At first I thought any reference to his nose must be as delicate a matter to him as it was to Cyrano de Bergerac. Possibly it was more delicate, for Catulle Coquard was certainly a criminal, which Cyrano was not, and all criminals are egoists and stuffed with vanity. But now, looking back, I think it was the sudden revelation that I was familiar enough not only with French, but with his own kind of French to use the word *bec* and not *nez* for his nose that alarmed him, and set him on his guard. Anyhow, his tone completely changed. As a matter of fact, I had myself begun to smell a rat ; but not so quickly as Catulle and, as will be apparent later, it was not the same animal.

Anyway, at that moment, and from that moment, Catulle stopped trying to be funny at my expense.

" The patron, I call him. He know where to look for zee man better zan me," he said soberly.

I let him go for Brisson ; but as the place was by this time thinning out its *habitués*, I slid my glass along

the bar to a point much nearer to where Brisson stood. And I did succeed in overhearing what passed between him and Coquard. That is to say, I heard many of the words used, but learned nothing except that both were past masters in the use of the thieves' jargon, in which hardly a single word retains its literal and natural meaning. That they did not need to be told the identity of the man I was looking for I did, however, infer from the frequency with which the word *tripoteur* was employed. *Tripoteur*—how often had I heard the word in the mouths of poor students. For *tripoteur* stood for *usurer*, and it was as a usurer that de Quettville had been pilloried on his own gate.

When Brisson turned towards me I was holding my glass before the light, examining its colour.

" My friend tells me, sir, you come here to look for some person," he said.

" That is one reason I had for coming," I replied.

" And you have not seen him, is it ? "

" Not yet."

Brisson considered a moment, then looked up.

" Possibly he is a gentleman, this one for whom you look ? "

" He would certainly expect to be so regarded."

The patron smote his thigh as light come to him.

" Ah, my friend, now one sees the mistake. Why, it is only the work people, and sailors, and such like who come here. Look you, over there, that is where gentlemen go." He pointed to the far end of the bar where, now that the place was half-empty, I saw a door which opened into a part of the wine shop apparently reserved for clients of a better class. Brisson smiled, at my dismayed face, I suppose.

" So," he went on humorously, " if the other reason was that you needed a refreshment, you go in there and my daughter, she will give it you herself—to console

you if you do not find there him you seek," he added genially.

" Thank you," I said. " I must, of course, look in there too. But I ought first to give you a warning."

" A warning ? " he repeated.

" Yes, it is most probable that the man I am in search of left his house in order to make an attack on you."

Brisson, hearing this, stood back from the counter, leaning up against one of the great brown varnished wine casks. But he was not really alarmed, though Coquard, who was affecting to be busy with a napkin and a glass while struggling hard to understand what was being said, appeared to think otherwise. Then Cæsar, seeing Coquard's startled eyes, laughed sonorously from the depths of his great chest.

" Attack me ? " he cried. " In that case, *mon bon jeune homme*, search well for the rascal—search everywhere." He turned laughing to the perplexed Coquard. " Catulle, *mon ami*, see you, here is one who would search this house. Shall we permit it ? "

Coquard came forward to stare at me.

" I like your cheeks," he nodded severely.

Brisson laughed till the tears stood in his eyes. He pushed Coquard away.

" But no, it is for one who would harm me he looks, Catulle," he explained, and then turning to me said : " You have no conception where he is, is it ? "

" No," I said ; " but I've undertaken to find him and I mean to do it." Then remembering the avocat's laughter, I added, " I mean to do it even if he is hidden in nothing bigger than the wine cask behind you."

There was a smash of glass. Turning, I saw Coquard staring like a stuck pig, the small towel shaking in his hands, and the glass he had been drying in fragments on the floor.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KNIFE IN THE DOOR

BRISSON burst into a sudden gargantuan roar of laughter at the look on Coquard's face. Probably he thought the dismay shown was out of all proportion to the supposed cause. I certainly did. The broken glass could not be worth more than a few pence. Several of the bystanders also laughed. Indeed, there was a very infectious quality in Cæsar Brisson's mirth. A thick-set stevedore in blue jersey and peaked cap, leaning back against the counter, turned his head to him.

"That's the second gone west since I came in 'ere," he observed.

"And the fifth to-day," Brisson nodded.

"Suppose you'll dock it off his wages all right," another suggested.

Brisson glanced playfully at Coquard.

"I might be tempted to if I paid him any," he said, with a chuckle. This, however, instantly alienated any sympathy that might be felt.

"Mean to say you pay no wages?" the man asked, setting down his tumbler. "My Gawd, no wonder the poor feller breaks your glasses!"

The outburst drew the attention of a couple of ship's stokers standing near, and one of them at least seemed to have drunk himself into readiness for any kind of row. A hefty ruffian he looked too, with a pair of fierce red-rimmed eyes and a fringe of red hair showing under his rakish but dilapidated peaked cap. He took the matter not exactly in the same way as the stevedore.

" What's this ? " he cried, pushing forward. " What's this I hear ? Not take no wages. Let's have a look at the mug what works for nothing."

Laying his two grimy paws on the counter he bent forward to stare at Coquard, who was now standing back against the wine casks.

" What you do it for, eh ? " he demanded. " That's what I wanter know. What you work for nothing for ? "

His mate, a little man not so inflamed, and scenting trouble, I suppose, from previous experiences, took him by the arm.

" But it's 'ardly work, Ted, old man—handling liquor, I mean ; it's not real hard work, not what we'd call work at all, is it now ? " he suggested persuasively.

Ted, however, waved him aside.

" Sam," he said, " we'd call it a dam' sight worse than work if we had to handle it all day long for others to drink, and well you know it."

My own attention, meanwhile, was chiefly given to Coquard. Comprehending very little of the language used, at first he thought from the laughter that he was being ridiculed, and his eyes wandered from face to face as he stood. Rather like a thin, erect slug in a white apron he was, with a swaying watchful head. At least if one can imagine a venemous slug that would have been Coquard then. But when the bellicose Ted came into the picture I fancy that while still a little bewildered, he ceased to be frightened. The situation created by the stoker was one he understood. I saw his right hand slip round to his thigh as the drunk, enraged stoker faced him again, the one man full of noises and fury like a wild bull ; the other keen and quiet like a reptile.

" You lousy bug of a dago, you'd take the meat and drink out of the mouth of a honest Britisher, would you ? "

"Easy on, Ted—not the drink," his friend expostulated.

But Ted took no heed of him, waving to Coquard and leaning as far as he could across the counter.

"Come 'ere," he cried; "come 'ere till I lay you over the bar and wallop you with my belt."

Laughter followed this sally. No one anticipated real trouble with the counter between the two men. But Coquard did come nearer, face bent forward well in advance towards the other man's, his right hand still on his hip as if protecting the threatened part. The laughter redoubled as the pair faced each other with outstretched necks, like a pair of fighting cocks. The man Sam, however, more sober, noted the position of Coquard's right hand.

"Look out, Ted," he shrilled warningly, "the dago's got a gun."

But the big fellow was too far gone to care even had he faced a battery. He made a clumsy grab for the scruff of Coquard's neck. As his hand shot out the Frenchman, swift as lightning, struck him a resounding smack on the cheek with the palm of his left hand. Probably the stoker had never in his life been so struck. It was insult more than injury, and as such probably infuriated him more than a blow would have done. And Coquard had not finished his insult. Before his enemy recovered from his surprise he spat full into his face.

"*Cochon!*" he cried, stepping back nimbly so that the blow aimed at his head fell short.

Some of those present rejoiced at the prospect of a bit of rough and tumble when the stoker got one knee upon the counter to go over the top for his man. No one appeared to see any significance in the hand Coquard still kept under his apron over his thigh. They were unused to that sort of thing. But Cæsar Brisson seemed

to know what Coquard kept in his hip pocket. He called excitedly to me, indicating the angry stoker :

" Stop him, pull him back—queek, queek ! "

But I did not move. I had no inclination to lift a finger to save Coquard from a possible hiding. Seeing from this that my sympathies were with the proletariat, Brisson, flipping up the counter flap, came round like a charging bull and got the stoker by the coat collar just as he was about to drop over to the other side. With one hand the man was yanked back to the proper side of the counter. Once there Cæsar slewed him round, and forcing both arms behind his back, got ready to frog march him to the door. The stoker, however, was not yet finished. His right foot swung forward for a mighty back-heel drive at Brisson's shins. Quick as he was, Brisson was quicker. At the moment he stood there on one leg he was sent flying to the floor on his face, all helter-skelter, in about as awkward and nasty a tumble as I ever saw.

This was too much for his mate, Sam. Lowering his head he ran like a butting ram straight for Brisson as he turned away smiling over his shoulder at the dazed man. And now it was Cæsar who was taken by surprise, for the little man's head got him fair on the pit of the stomach, and down they both went in a heap, the little stoker on top.

That, however, was the end of his triumph. And it must be admitted that there was much to admire in the good-humoured way Brisson took the indignity put upon him. Not a sign of temper was visible as he laid one arm over the small man, pinning him down while he himself got to his feet ; and then, picking up the other by the leather belt round his waist, carried him to the door much as if he were a coal bucket, to deposit him outside. After that most of us, in open-mouthed silence, watched him set the big fellow on his feet,

with no appearance of extra effort, and lead him, dazed and obedient, to the door. That done, he came back to us with a smile, wiping his hands with a handkerchief.

" They will be good boys next time," he pronounced.

I thought this very likely. Brisson, instead of returning to his position behind the counter, approached me.

" Very fonny, *hein* ? " He smiled confidentially. " But you will see how leetle have I need for a warning." He gave me a familiar—an over-familiar—finger dig in the ribs. " Nozzing to fear from my old brother-in-law, eh ? "

I somehow contrived not to flinch. He stood so close up to me, his black eyes mirthful from utter self-assurance.

" No," I agreed, " nothing to fear from him."

" Good ; it is agreed." He took my arm. " Then come and have a drink. This is no place for you."

With this last statement I was now in entire agreement.

" Still," I said, as we proceeded up the bar towards the superior bar, " you never know, you know. That little fellow you carried out, he managed to take you by surprise."

Brisson snapped his fingers contemptuously.

" But even so did not I carry him out and drop him in the gutter ? Pah, I know how to—what you call it ? —look out for Nombre One ! "

For some time, ever, that is, since the good Catulle had dropped and smashed the glass, a vague uneasiness had been gnawing its way into my mind. To define the feeling more exactly, or to connect it with any adequate cause, was at that moment beyond me. The feeling of vague disquiet had several causes, but I fancy it began with the perception that Catulle Coquard both

feared and hated me for no reason then apparent. And this fact, when associated with the impression I had of having seen him somewhere or other before our first meeting on the island, set my head whirling with the wildest speculations. That Coquard was a dangerous rascal admitted of no doubt. His familiarity with the lingo of the Paris *apaché* proved it. But that fact about him did not stand alone. Sam, the stoker, had shouted a warning that Coquard had a gun in his hip pocket. He was wrong there. He had no gun, but he had a weapon, nevertheless; and it was because I knew what that weapon was that I knew just where Coquard hailed from, and what his habits were in such matters.

Yet, struggle as I did, I could recall no previous contact with him; and that now troubled me much, for well I knew the danger of being feared and hated by one of his type. It would have meant a speedy end for me in his own *quartier*, even supposing I were no more to him than a passing inconvenience. And by this time I suspected I was much more than that. My head, in fact, was in a whirl with a variety of new possibilities connected with the disappearance of Hilaire de Quettville. And though I felt I might yet find him—felt indeed I had come very near to finding him—not now did I think I would find him alive. But that was a conclusion at which I arrived later in the evening. Had it come sooner it is unlikely that Cæsar Brisson would have been able to lead me so tamely into the room in his wine shop reserved for his better-class customers.

It was, however, neither the room nor the customers that took my eye as I stood on the two steps down into the smaller room. What first took my eye was what would have inevitably taken the eye of any man, and that was the sight of Judith Brisson behind the bar. To say that she, for the moment, banished the thoughts about

de Quettville then whirling in my head, is to give the measure of that first impression.

Le Marinel's story about her presence in that place had aroused my interest. He had told me that Brisson, though proud of the girl, had put her to serve in the bar in order to provoke de Quettville, and I now remembered wondering what the girl herself would think about it, and decided that much would depend on whether she had more of the de Quettville in her than of Brisson.

Now, looking at her talking to a customer as she stood in easy attitude behind the bar, one hand poised on her hip and the other holding a long-stemmed red rose which she was coquettishly passing before her lips and tilted chin, I judged her to be all Brisson. A dark, handsome wench would suffice as her description; unmistakably French from her mass of black hair, the colour repeated in her eyes and arched eyebrows and dress, with a dead white skin and a mouth more vividly red than the rose, but unmistakably made so by art, not by nature. She certainly did not look out of place there. A small mirror stood on the shelf behind her, for consultation as required.

When Brisson shut the door behind me and returned to his own department I hesitated. My notion had been that he meant to present me to his daughter. Besides the man engaging her in talk, a thick-set fellow in plus fours, lolling against the counter, there were but three other men present in the snug little room. Two sat at a table with their heads together, evidently intent on some private matter, and a young man by himself at the table in the corner. As I reached the counter the girl turned to me, putting her rose down and raising her eyebrows interrogatively, exactly like Brisson. I had not thought what my drink was to be. Abruptly the man at my elbow shot out a huge fist and grabbed the rose, holding it high above his head as she made a vain

attempt to stop him. He stood back, broke off the long stem and put the flower in his buttonhole, laughingly watching her.

" Oh, Mr. Drury," she cried in dismay, clasping her hands, " you 'ave spoilt it."

" Then you won't want it back."

" But yes, yes ; give it to me."

He lifted a finger at her waggishly.

" Ah, that means you *did* get it from some man."

" Mr. Drury, give it to me," she pleaded.

Mr. Drury shook his head.

" I don't give things away for nothing," he said, lifting the lapel of his jacket to sniff elaborately at the rose.

As if this action conveyed a suggestion, the girl produced and held up a small, squat, glass-stoppered bottle.

" Look," she said persuasively, " I'll give you some of this for it—*Boquet de L'ile.* Give me your handkerchief."

Mr. Drury seemed to see he had gone far enough. He removed the flower.

" Call me George first," he demanded, holding back.

" George," she repeated, eagerly extending her hand. But it was the handkerchief he first gave her ; and presently there floated my way, not the scent I expected, but a fresh, yet delicate perfume, pervasive yet not violent, that reminded me not of boudoirs or bars but of wild flowers in dewy fields at night. The girl held her recovered rose by the inch of stem that remained.

" It is quite spoiled now," she said.

Mr. Drury laughed.

" Stick it in your hair," he advised. " Just above the ear, that's where the pretty brown girls in the Pacific Islands put their flowers. I've seen them."

She turned to me at last.

" Something soft," I said.

" A Pussyfoot ? " she suggested.

" What's that ? "

" Oh, grenadine, with orange and a few other things."

" Just what I want. Do I get a straw with it ? "

" Yes," she replied, with a smile, " you drink it through a straw."

Mr. Drury gave what sounded like a grunt of derision or contempt. While she was mixing the ingredients of my drink I picked up a book lying face downwards and half-open on the counter, which she had evidently been reading before Mr. Drury began his *badinage.* I remember wondering what the French equivalent would be to the type of fiction favoured by an English barmaid. Gyp or Collette probably. But had the book been the Bible itself I could not have been more surprised, for it was Pascal's *Pensees.* At my involuntary whistle she turned her head, and the man wheeled round and saw me with the volume in my hand.

" A bit naughty, eh ? " Drury sniggered.

He was a big, hulking fellow, in the mid thirties, and his face had that rough scrubbed looking freshness of colour often seen in the hard liver who drinks too much and tries to wipe out the traces.

" You don't read French then ? " I suggested.

" Not me ! My dad was a parson, and I had a careful upbringing."

" You don't say so ! "

He did not seem to know his own kind of cheap chaff except when he himself used it.

" Fact, I assure you," he replied, with a wink to the girl. " But he died suddenly and left me an orphan."

" And his work unfinished ? "

The ripple of laughter from the girl set him blinking, and his mood changed from the jocose to the quarrelsome.

" Look here," he said, with fuddled gravity, " you go

away, I don't like you. What right have you to butt in when I'm talking to this lady?" He waved an imperious hand, raising his voice. "You go away and you'll find out, as others have done, that I'm not a man to be trifled with."

Well, as I had received my big glass with the straw and had no desire just then to trifle with any one, I turned away and sat down near the young man at the corner table. Seeing me look about for a place for my glass he pushed aside the ash tray and removed his hat from the table, an invitation in his eyes. He had nice, candid eyes and a sensitive, humorous mouth. But though he seemed disposed to talk I, having a mighty lot to think about just then, gave him merely a stiff nod of thanks, and the almost eager look of expectancy died from his youthful ingenuous face. In a few seconds I had ceased to be conscious of his proximity.

How much had to be decided within the next few minutes! All my theories about the disappearance of de Quettville had been shaken since entering the wine shop. I needed time in which to consider the facts which had disturbed those theories. Indeed, I had to consider whether or no, not my own theories only, but also those of Carey and Sullivant were not equally far away from actual fact.

In trying to reconstruct and weigh the various incidents which had happened I began with Coquard's accidental dropping of the wine glass. That rascal, who for some reason I could not yet divine, feared me, dropped the glass on hearing me tell Brisson I meant to search everywhere for de Quettville. No! not for de Quettville, but for a missing man whose name had not been mentioned. But Brisson, at least, knew who the man was. I had declared that I intended to search every hole and corner, every nook and cranny, and had added, looking about for a simile and seeing Brisson's background,

even if it were a place no bigger than a wine cask. On that the glass smashed on the floor. But was it not a pure accident? Coquard had already, as the stevedore remarked, dropped a glass. And there was nothing to show that was not an accident. I wished I had heard just why and how the first came to be broken. And if Brisson spoke the truth when he said it was the fifth his henchman had dropped that day, it merely revealed the condition of Coquard's nerves, for it was incredible that this could be a daily occurrence.

But though I believed the stevedore about the first glass, I did not believe Brisson about the five. Brisson knew the name of the man for whom I was searching. Missing men on a small island are not numerous and, as I saw, he could hardly escape hearing of his brother-in-law's disappearance. It was, therefore, quite a safe inference for him to make that the two were the same. But there was something far farther from a natural explanation in the way he had handled the situation after Coquard's misadventure with the glass.

As I saw it, Coquard, listening with all his ears, as he undoubtedly had been, but with an imperfect understanding to what passed between Cæsar and myself, might have come to the conclusion that I knew much more than was actually the case, and the fear previously shown deepened into panic, *because* he himself had some degree of responsibility for de Quettville's disappearance?

It was then, I knew, that my feeling of disquiet began, an uneasiness that only deepened when I saw the adroit manner in which Brisson seized on and developed the stevedore's intervention to obliterate any suspicion Coquard's act might have roused in my mind. And if his subsequent talk with me was not intended to see if he had achieved that end, it looked very like it.

" Nozzing to fear from my very old brother-in-law, eh ? " he had remarked challengingly after throwing out the stoker. He certainly had not in the sense in which I had warned him—if de Quettville were dead. But it was my belief that Brisson spoke as he did to find out if I really did entertain any suspicion of—of what ? Foul play ? Anyhow, now I felt glad that I had obeyed the instinct telling me to allow him to show me into the reserved bar. This would allay any suspicion he might have. That, at least, is what I hoped. For he would not conceive that any one with my suspicions would linger on in his wine shop. So I recognised that it was a sound instinct which had guided me at that moment, although I might have felt, when the door shut gently behind me, much as if it were a prison door, had I not found others also there.

Looking up to reassure myself they were still there, I found the pleasant-faced young man staring at me. I was rather abashed when our eyes met. He pointed to my forgotten drink.

" You'll excuse me," he said, " but it's seldom I see a man in such profound meditation."

This naïvete disarmed me. I took a pull through the straw in the large tumbler.

" I was just thinking."

He bent forward questioningly.

" About how you could get quits with that fellow at the bar ? "

" No, about what is going to happen next."

" Gee, you must be a bigger stranger to this island than I am."

" Why ? "

" Why, not to have seen already that this is the sort of place where nothing ever happens."

Now this was rather like hearing one's own voice issuing out of another man's lips.

"That's what I thought last Thursday."

"And right you were," he nodded.

"No; quite wrong."

He sat up.

"Wrong?"

"Absolutely. It's the sort of place where anything may happen. In fact, such queer things have been happening that, as I told you, I'm left wondering what is to happen next."

He looked me all over, not omitting to throw a swift glance at my glass. Having apparently satisfied himself that I was neither trying to be funny at his expense nor speaking out of an alcoholically stimulated imagination he seemed yet more perplexed.

"Say," he said plaintively, "I don't know what you're getting at, but sitting there just now you looked as dull and desolate as a Methodist parson considering the collection on a wet Sunday night."

"I was wondering whether I'd be murdered when I stepped outside."

Some instinct told me it was safe to be frank with the clear-eyed young stranger; but it was not instinct alone that induced me to speak out. I'd heard it said you can never take an American citizen by surprise, and an impulse to make the attempt led me into this recklessness. Surprised he may have been, but he showed more pleasure than surprise. His face lit up like a lamp.

"Reach any conclusion about it?" he whispered hopefully.

"I did. Do you want to hear it?"

"Sure."

"I believe I'll be all right if I don't leave this place alone."

He shoved his hand across the table.

"Count on me. Gee, this is just like being back home again!"

That was all. The hand grip he gave me dispelled the qualm of fear that rose in me the moment after I had so rashly spoken. But it was his clear, candid eyes that made me trust him. The validity of all our judgments depends on our ability to make comparisons ; and after Coquard's shifty little pig's eyes, and Cæsar Brisson's, with, as I suspected, all the malice of a devil lurking behind the affected good humour, I knew I could rely on this man. Besides, there was no one else. For by this time I felt I was in deep waters, and had been ever since I so innocently entered that infernal wine shop.

My new friend leaned over the table to whisper rapidly.

" Is it that guy chinning with the girl ? "

" No, the two Frenchmen in the bar, especially the small man, Coquard by name. He's done something, and he thinks I know. He's frightened and I know what his sort does when that happens."

" It's nothing you've done then ? "

" Heavens, no ! It's something he thinks I've discovered. But all I actually know is that there is certainly something about him and about this place that cries out to be discovered, and I'd be sorry to die before I've done it."

" Right you are, boy," he replied heartily. " Just say right away what I'm to do."

That was talking !

" First of all," I said, " go out there as if you were leaving and see what the pair are up to."

He rose at once and lit a cigarette.

" That's letting me in easy. I'll leave my case here so's I can come back to collect it."

We took leave of each other in the off-hand manner of chance acquaintances, he bowing to the girl at the bar on his way to the door. The man with her had, of course, his back towards us and did not turn. But I

observed his head go up as the girl smiled, and now I noticed that the angle at which her mirror stood had been changed. Whether by design or accident it had been changed so as to include the corner in which we sat. The mirror was there doubtless for her own use, but whether or no her companion had been using it to spy on us, I could not then tell. In any case, its position must have been altered not by him but by the girl. What I did know was that although she had frequently looked over at our corner the man had never once turned, though it was only now when I saw how that little mirror caught the light at its new angle, I knew that to see us he had no need to turn round. Yet in the next breath I was telling myself that all this was no more than the product of an imagination overheated by the night's events. The more probable explanation was that the girl had taken up the mirror with no more sinister motive than to apply some powder to her nose, and the angle at which it now stood was the angle at which she had set it down, not by design but by accident.

So my thoughts turned to where I believed the real danger lay. That any attack would be made on me in the wine shop itself was highly improbable, since too many people had seen me there, and if I, too, disappeared the fact of my being last seen in the wine shop would be easily established. There was, perhaps, scarcely any safer place for me just then than the wine shop. But the trouble, if trouble there was to be, would come as soon as I stepped outside. So at least the situation appeared to me then, and I began to wonder what was happening on the other side of the door.

I had asked the young American to see what the pair were up to; but now I did not think he would find both men there. If Brisson were the absent one I though it not unlikely that I might get a knock on the head somewhere in the dark as I took my way along the

deserted quay, after which it would be as easy for him to drop me into the harbour as it had been for him to drop the drunken stoker into the gutter. The perception of that possibility made me sit up, remembering Brisson's attempt to get me to interfere with that same stoker. Had this been in his mind as early in the evening as that? Whether or no, it was obvious what conclusion would be formed if my body were found in the harbour after I had been engaged in a brawl with a drink-maddened stoker in a quay-side wine shop.

Luckily for me my instinct against Coquard had kept me unresponsive to Brisson's call, and so the attempt to involve me had failed. But this, I fancied, only meant that another method would be employed, and a more subtle agent—Coquard probably. Coquard who was as familiar, doubtless, with the latest murder methods as he was with the latest words in the *apaché* vocabulary. Of the two I would much rather have to face Brisson. But my conclusion was that Coquard would be the man waiting for his chance somewhere outside in the dark. So I resolved I must avoid those labyrinthine passages behind the quay which I had partly explored, and take my way home along the quay which though almost as dark, was much more open.

The next moment my ally came hastily stumbling down the two steps into the room, feeling in his pockets.

"Say, Scottie," he addressed me, "you haven't got your foot on my cigarette case, have you now? I 'pear to have dropped it in your vicinity."

He was evidently enjoying his part. Looking round the table, I picked the case off the seat he had occupied just as the man at the bar wheeled round to look at me, his eyes now fishy from liquor.

"Getting into trouble again, are you?" he said with mock severity, wagging a finger at me. "Bad

boy, ver' bad boy. Knew at once you hadn't been well brought up."

"Anyway, I do not put my feet on chairs," I said with affected coldness, handing the case to its owner.

"But what about your nose?" the bully over at the bar demanded. "Don't you occasionally put that where it isn't wanted?"

The American boy's laugh induced me to make a foolish retort.

"Yes, sometimes; but on the other hand I occasionally put something else where it is very badly wanted."

"Such as?" he sneeringly inquired.

"The toe of my boot."

It was the girl who saved the situation. Just as the fellow with clenched fists was about to make a rush at me, she leant forward over the bar and caught one of his wrists.

"Mr. Drury," she cried, "none of that now."

"Let go, Judy, let go!"

He struggled to free his hand, and the thing might have ended in an ugly brawl but for the opportune entrance of a jovial party of friends, apparently anxious to get in a last drink before closing time. They were all talking at once, and under cover of their merry babble Miss Brisson, with a significant look and quick gesture, indicated the exit. Although it was to the American she signalled, I obeyed promptly enough when he took my arm. Not that I was afraid of Mr. Drury. All the past season I had played as a second row forward for the Scottish at Richmond, and as I was still hard with training my notion was that I could have put that drink-sodden ruffian to the floor with one hand behind my back. Fortunately, however, I had also a notion that one must not figure in a public-house brawl while looking after another man's practice. Besides, had I not enough

trouble on hand already, waiting for me out there, in the person of either Coquard or Brisson?

So as soon as the American youth pushed me through the door I looked along the length of the bar with keen curiosity, remembering that whichever of the pair we found absent probably indicated the kind of danger, which, but for the presence of my new-found friend, I would have been compelled to face.

Then the surprise came. Both Brisson and Coquard were there, busily attending to the closing-time rush orders. But not so busy as to miss seeing us as we threaded our way for the exit. Cæsar smiled to me over the bent heads at the counter. He seemed pleased with himself.

"No danger yet," he nodded.

This startled me for a second till I saw he was referring to the warning I had given him earlier in the evening.

"Good-night," I called back.

"*Au revoir*," he returned, with a wave of the hand and another show of gleaming teeth.

As for the good Catulle, if he did not smile his adieu at least he no longer scowled, which probably in him was an equivalent; and yet, impassive as his expression was, in his little pig's eyes I detected a sparkle of satisfaction.

I left the wine shop feeling very foolish and perplexed. My perplexity arose from the fact that I could not account for the change in these two men. Something had happened, something must have happened while I was in the other room. If Coquard had dreaded something before, he certainly had in the interval got rid of his fear. That was my first thought. But the second came close on its heels—the conviction that I had made a fool of myself that night.

I walked some distance before I became conscious

that the young American was at my side, and the recollection of all I had said to him about the danger that threatened me, filled me with shame. I *felt* him laughing at me, and at the moment would have welcomed an attack as a justification for all the elaborate precautions I had taken to get away safely. We had covered some distance before, I suppose, he mastered his amusement sufficiently to trust his voice.

" Say," he whispered, touching my arm, " when does the attack begin ? "

But under his solemnity I could detect mirth.

" Oh, go to the devil ! " I retorted, turning away and marching off up St. Julian's Avenue. He did not follow. Possibly this black ingratitude on my part left him rooted to the spot. I did not look back to see. But I did see that I appeared to be as far away as ever from solving the mystery of de Quettville's disappearance.

On reaching home I paused on the doorstep, latch key in hand, debating whether to enter at once or to work off my depression with a smart walk before turning in. It was late, the house was already asleep and the roads empty. My sense of fatigue made an easy-chair and a book more inviting. I turned round to insert the latch-key. Then, as I leant down to find the keyhole there came an odd kind of thud on the door. It was as if some one on the inside had struck one sharp blow on the panel. Involuntarily I stood up to listen, and as I did so a quick rustle from the laurel shrubbery by the gate made me wheel round. No one, perhaps, escapes that slight thrill of alarm when in the dark unexpected noises sound, especially if they come from different directions and the cause is unseen.

For an instant I felt somehow surrounded. I watched the shrubbery keenly. When the silence continued, feeling sure that nothing lurked there but a prowling cat, I turned again to the door—and then discovered

what it was that Catulle Coquard carried at his hip! Deep into the panel of the door, still quivering, stuck a long, thin-bladed knife. Luckily for me, at the moment it was thrown I chanced to bend down to find the unfamiliar keyhole. But for that it would now be quivering between my ribs.

CHAPTER IX

A CALL ON THE TELEPHONE

FOR perhaps fifteen seconds I stared hard at that knife. Then a flash of thought connected it with the rustling I had heard among the shrubs, and wheeling round, I leaped for the gate. For now I knew from that sound that the skulking scoundrel was bolting after observing his throw miss.

Out on the road, however, seeing no one I was forced to stop and listen, since I could not tell whether he had gone to right or left. Down the road I heard the sound of feet on the pavement, but the footsteps were those of a man walking, and in less than a minute I could tell he was coming towards me. So my ear went in the other direction; it was the sound of running feet I wanted.

Somewhere up the road a dog suddenly rent the silence by a burst of furious barking. Taking the cue, I headed up as hard as I could go, and when the barking burst out afresh as I shot past a house some two hundred yards ahead, I judged that the hint given me by the dog was a good one.

Confident that I could run my man down, I made the pace as hot as any I had ever pulled out, and flaming

with anger, pictured to myself the leap I would take on his back the moment I got within range. Unfortunately for me, however, it was not a question of speed or even of stamina alone, and long before I got really tested in wind or leg I had to draw up at the Vauvert crossing to ascertain which of the possible three roads had been taken by the fugitive.

Precious seconds had to be squandered at the cross-roads as I again stood straining to catch the sound of running feet. And this time there was no friendly dog to signal to me. So hearing nothing, I had to take a chance, this time with the odds two to one against me. I took the left road because it led downhill, and because there was a turn in it a little way ahead which might have prevented me from hearing him, and because, unlike the other two, it led back to the heart of the town. But by the time I dropped into Trinity Square I knew pursuit to be hopeless. There were so many twists and turns, too many odd corners, archways, side streets and garden gates in that neighbourhood that the odds now were that I was running away from rather than overtaking the man. Recognising this as I stopped for a breather under Trinity Church, I reluctantly turned up Allez Street, towards home. And once the heat of the chase died down I saw that short of catching the blackguard red-handed on the spot, there was little use in catching him a mile or so away from the scene of his abortive attempt.

But there was still his knife in the door to connect him with that attempt. That same knife with certain suspicions I could not now dislodge from my mind, I proposed to lay before the Chief Constable next morning. Coquard, if Coquard it was, had blundered badly in making this attack. I had left the wine shop inclined to regard myself as a fanciful, over-suspicious fool who had been reading sinister significance into words and actions,

all capable of a natural and innocent interpretation. And now by this attempt Coquard had revived and confirmed my worst suspicions. It was he who was the fool, not me; he was one of that worst kind of fool, the fool who cannot leave well alone. Thus by the time I reached home my self-esteem had triumphantly re-established itself from the shock it had received.

But a new shock awaited me—a shock which proved that I had been fooled after all. And the shock awaited me on the doorstep. For as soon as I reached the step I saw that the knife was no longer in the door! Not for a second did I doubt whose hand had pulled it out. And as I stared at the deep incision left where it had penetrated the wood, I am bound to say I could not recall a moment in my life when I felt so cheap. Actually I had been got to run away from, instead of after, the would-be assassin. That dog up the road, it was probably only a stray cat in his own shrubbery that had set him off roaring his indignation into space. And all the time there was another cat lurking in my own shrubbery—a cat indeed!

It was long before sleep came to me that night. At first I strove to remember what I knew of knife throwing. Once or twice in hospital I had come across cases where, on some foreign ship then in dock, the knife had been so used. Not many cases, for though the art of throwing is difficult, it is, in expert hands, deadly, and the result, nine times out of ten, merely a concern for the coroner. But I had always understood that the knife throwing was practised only in southern latitudes. Never had I heard of its use by the Paris apache, partial as he naturally is to the silent knife in a city so wakeful, so crowded and so well policed. Yet how useful in Paris the thrown knife could be in the hands of one who had elsewhere acquired the art! Especially among the

brethren of the knife themselves when one of them fell out with another, what an advantage it gave! He had at his command the virtues of both knife and gun, with the defects of both abolished. He could, that is, kill without risking an encounter at close quarters, and yet silently without a noisy detonation.

That had been the notion of how things were to go with me! And now as certain other matters wove their way into my mind it did not seem such a bad notion after all. For if I had not happened to stoop unexpectedly merely to find a keyhole set rather low in the door and still unfamiliar to me, there was no doubt in my own mind, after seeing the position and depth of the cut left in the door, that the attempt would certainly have succeeded. Then after he had withdrawn the long knife from my back what would have remained to connect him with the crime? Investigation would establish, of course, the fact that I had spent a considerable time at the Perigord wine shop, that early in the evening there had been a brawl with a stoker at which I had been present, that later I had myself a quarrel with another man which led to the intervention of Miss Brisson who had signalled me to leave, and that I had left in the company of a stranger who appeared to be an American.

Where in all this was there anything to direct one breath of suspicion on Coquard? The American? Catulle could certainly not have reckoned on my making such prompt confidences to a stranger. But supposing this American tourist left next morning, as from his boredom seemed very likely, he would be the first man for whom the police would search since he was the last in whose company I had been seen. And supposing he repeated all I said to him of my suspicions and fears of an attack by either Coquard or Brisson he would only increase his own danger, for it would be held to

be and would assuredly sound like a cock-and-bull story invented to divert suspicion elsewhere.

It amazed me to recognise how suspicion might point to any one rather than Coquard. Evidence could even be obtained that this American had accused me of trying to purloin his cigarette case! Even the bellicose stoker, so obviously spoiling for a fight with any one who would fight him, would be suspected before the good Catulle.

Coquard no doubt had perceived all this, recognised his chance and promptly taken it. My respect for him deepened. I had acted like an idiot throughout. Above all when I allowed him to retrieve that knife, which was the one thing that could connect him with the attempt. He had known his danger when his throw failed; but his nerve did not fail, and I was convinced he deliberately made that rustle among the bushes by the gate, calculating to a nicety the moment or two it would take me to realise the significance of the noise, just enough to let him slip inside the next gate. Then when he saw me charging past he coolly returned to recover the one damning piece of evidence against himself. I had been no more than a child in his hands. And in admitting the fact to myself, I set my teeth in the pillow, in helpless mortification, much indeed as a child might have done.

But that night I did not sleep like a child. For hours I lay awake reconsidering the situation, tossing and turning sleeplessly. Ultimately I reached the conclusion that at whatever cost to my personal pride I must lay all my suspicions before the local authorities. But it wasn't going to be easy. For I would have to begin by admitting I had been totally mistaken in my assertion that de Quettville was alive. And that admission of error made a poor foundation on which to gain credence for the theory I had to advance as to the

manner of his death. Indeed, it was a wild theory in itself, so wild that I myself doubted whether it was not born out of the distorted workings of a sleepless and overwrought brain. In a word, my conclusion was that Brisson and Coquard between them had made away with de Quettville, that de Quettville's body lay somewhere in the wine shop when I entered, but had been somehow disposed of before I left, Coquard having become certain I knew more than I, in fact, did know.

Such were the conclusions arrived at as I lay and considered all that had happened that night, but I wondered whether it would all look so plain in the cold light of morning. I was rather diffident about theories by this time, having formed so many that had gone wrong.

When morning came, however, my resolve to communicate my new theory to Le Marinel stood unchanged. He might turn down my suspicions as he and the police had turned down my opinion as to de Quettville's mental condition. That I could not help. But it galled me to think of that knife! That knife would have spoken for itself! As it was, I had only suspicions, and if in his lawyer-like fashion he asked for concrete facts I had, once, again, only opinions to offer. Under such circumstances a visit to the lawyer would be very like a visit to the dentist.

Then as I sat so thinking I remembered with a thrill of relief that it was Sunday. La Marinel would not be at his office. Of course I could have as easily gone to his house in the Rue Galette, but I seized as eagerly at a day's respite from a humiliating interview with the lawyer as I would from an equally painful interview with any dentist. On the other hand, a full day's quiet meditation might yield something more tangible than vague suspicions. And I knew that to call in the police

and point to a hole in the door made by a knife which I had seen but for a moment while searching for a key-hole, after spending a whole evening in a wine shop, would be more likely to damage my character than to convince them of that knife's reality. Carey himself, I gathered, thought me too fanciful and alarmist in my theories already.

But the day closed with a curious incident which had unforeseen consequences. I had gone to bed rather early, somewhere about half-past ten, and was trying to induce sleep with a book, when the telephone at my bedside rang sharply. A night call is never a welcome sound. I dropped the book and stretched out for the receiver with a groan.

" 'Allo, 'allo, is that Dr. Wright ? " A voice of high-pitched feminine quality was at my ear.

" No," I responded. " Dr. Wright is away. Dr. Dunn, his *locum*, speaking."

" Then "—the voice came quickly and in considerable agitation—" Mrs. le Noury of Rozel in Torteval, she has had another seizure of heart ; will you at once come, please ? "

Even with less knowledge than I possessed of the island's geography I could have told that Torteval was situated in some remote part where the country folk spoke English with an idiom more or less French. This was hard luck ! Wright had told me he had only about three country patients on his books, and this was the second country call, the first being de Quettville, also a night visit, as I well remembered. Wright had taken away his car too. Then as I was remembering all this the voice came again.

" If it is that you cannot yourself come, will you send anozzer doctor, please ? "

That settled it. After all I was there to look after Wright's patients.

" All right," I replied. " I'll come at once. Just ring off and I'll call up the garage for a car."

" Oh, but we send the car for you, doctor."

" You are sending a car ? "

" But yais, doctor. Indeed it has already left. It is so—so urgent, and your garage man he might not quickly find the house."

With a word of thanks I replaced the receiver and jumped out of bed. But as I was getting into my clothes a thought made me ring up the exchange.

" Give me Rozel, Torteval, Mrs. le Noury, please. I'm sorry but I haven't the number."

After a long pause the girl's voice came.

" Sorry, but they do not appear to be on the telephone."

" But," I expostulated, " you put through a call to this number from that very address not three minutes ago."

Another pause, shorter this time.

" The call we put through to your number came from a public telephone office."

" In Torteval ? "

" No, Smith Street."

That indeed startled me. Here was something queer. For Smith Street was not more than six minutes' walk from where I stood. Was the call a hoax ? Perhaps. There are adult fools who think it funny to ring a fire alarm and call out the fire brigade, just as there are small boys who ring the front door bell and run away. Still, neither the doctor nor the fire brigade dares assume any call to be a hoax. So telling myself that the arrival of the car would settle the question, I went on with my hurried preparations. Torteval, I understood, was about six miles out, and if the car had already left—a sudden thought made me stop and straighten up. The next instant I was down the stairs and into the consulting room, whirling the pages of the case-book Wright had

left for my guidance. Then another fact came to light: Dr. Wright had no patient in Turteval. More than that, Dr. Wright had no patient anywhere of the name of le Noury.

Uneasiness deepened before the new questions that now faced me. Why had the call not come direct from the house in Turteval? Who was the person who had rung me up from St. Peter Port? How did that person know that the car had already left? Plausible explanations of these peculiarities I could perceive, but I did not believe in them.

Not that I took the call to be a bad joke. That the car would come I now felt assured. When it did I would have a good look at it, get its number, and see who was in it, for I thought it very likely that it would contain one other besides the driver.

But the car did not come. Till well beyond midnight I stood watching the empty road from an upper window. The road remained empty. Then I thought I knew what had happened. This was no hoax. Not at least, in the ordinary sense. Unlike the little boy, the caller had not rung my bell and then run away. On the contrary he had, with admirable caution and foresight, hung on to the line, overheard my question to the exchange, heard the information thus elicited, saw the dawning of my suspicions, foresaw the steps I would take to verify those suspicions, and stopped the car in time.

But how nearly I had been caught on the hop! If only the sick call method had been tried before that knife throwing incident which had made me so much more alert and wary, I might so easily have walked into the trap. That was plain. What, however, remained inexplicable was why there should be a trap for me at all. The thing was beyond me.

Then as I paced up and down feeling helpless and exasperated, I remembered the one man of my acquaint-

ance capable of flooding daylight on the whole business. Wright had suggested I might care to have a friend over for a week or two, and I had thanked him without ever thinking of taking advantage of his offer. But now I recalled the offer with more gratitude. So there and then I sat down and wrote to McNab, telling him not only what a delightful place this island in the Channel was, but also giving him enough of the facts about my perplexities to whet his appetite for more.

Francis McNab was not the intimate friend Wright no doubt had in his mind ; indeed at our first encounter when I was attempting to shield a blind friend of mine who had got himself into sore trouble, we were in opposite camps. But the respect I had developed for his talents as a detective made me sure he was the one man I knew with the capacity for the moment's need.

CHAPTER X

LE MARINEL BRINGS NEWS

NEXT morning before breakfast I went to the post office and expressed my letter to McNab. At the same time I sent him a wire to prepare him for its arrival. Having satisfied myself that the letter would be delivered in sufficient time, if he were free and willing, to allow him to catch the boat train at Waterloo that night and be in Guernsey on Tuesday morning, I strolled home with an easier mind. That he would find the case attractive I did not doubt. Moreover, after reading over the letter in the morning I had added a postscript with reference to the knife throwing incident and the disappearance of de Quettville which would, I knew, draw McNab as surely as honey draws a wasp.

So I was thinking as I paused on the step to look at that cut in the door, my one tangible bit of evidence, when the gate clicked. Turning, I saw Le Marinel. His haste, a trace of excitement on his face, as well as the early hour, told me something was up. He shook my hand so warmly too, and for that, remembering that our parting had been rather warm in a less pleasant sense, I was unprepared.

"Dunn," he began, "I'm so glad to find you at home."

Wondering, I told him I had not even begun breakfast yet.

"All right," he nodded. "I'll come in and watch you eat it while you watch me eat my own words."

This mystified me indeed. But without more ado I led him inside. I did not, however, sit down to breakfast.

"First of all," he began, with his eyes on the floor, I owe you an apology."

"You don't for laughing at me last night!" I interjected, disconcerted, since I was now aware how well his amusement had been justified.

He looked up in his bird-like fashion.

"Did I laugh last night? Well, I'm not laughing this morning."

"Neither am I, for that matter. In fact, I was coming to see you myself if you hadn't come," I said uneasily, preparing to admit my blunder about de Quettville.

Le Marinel, however, seemed not to hear me, and I was astonished now to see he was as uncomfortable as myself. The next moment he was giving me the shock of my life.

"You were entirely right and Sullivant completely wrong about de Quettville," he said quietly; "he *is* alive."

"Alive?"

" Yes ; he has been seen."

After a moment I got back enough breath to stammer a question.

" Where—when—by whom ? "

" At Perigord, by the housekeeper, Mrs. Bichard and the maid, Alice Mauger, at about a quarter to four this morning. He has been in hiding, of course, exactly as you said, and he evidently still is. Even Carey is now satisfied about that."

I dropped into a chair, motioning Le Marinel to another, but he was blind to my gesture.

" Go on," I implored.

" The message from Mrs. Bichard was brought to Carey by a man Tozer, a grower who came in about six-thirty with a consignment of tomatoes for the cargo boat. Tozer said the housekeeper had come round to his place just after five while he was loading the cases on his cart, and told him she had seen her master in the garden and asking him to inform me or Carey. My place not being open Tozer went and saw Torode at the Chief's office, and the sergeant rang up Carey who got out of bed and dashed off to Perigord. Well, the old woman's story is that just before dawn she found herself suddenly awake. It was, she said, as if some one had touched her. She could not say what it was, only that she started up out of deep sleep, completely awake.

" She lay awake for some time till, in fact, there was sufficient light to let her see that the hands of her clock stood at five to four. She turned over and was going off to sleep again when she heard a noise like, she says, something falling. It frightened her, but she admits she has been jumpy ever since de Quettville disappeared. Anyhow, she got up and went to rouse Alice, the maid, whose room is near the top of the stairs. She found the girl was sitting up in bed terrified.

She had heard noises downstairs and now absolutely refused to move.

"The girl's terror communicated itself to the housekeeper, and after locking themselves in, Mrs. Bichard sat down on the bed to listen while they waited for daylight. The girl got up after the door was locked, and was putting on some clothes near the window when she startled Mrs. Bichard with a sudden cry. The old woman got off the bed and hurried to the window through which Alice was staring.

"It was much clearer outside, not daylight but growing lighter every minute, and she saw a figure crossing towards the stables. She recognised her master at once. So did Alice Mauger. Carey found both women positive about that, and the point is that the recognition was independent; he found there was no suggestion from one to the other as to who it was until both had independently recognised de Quettville. They both said they knew him at once. Pressed as to the points on which she founded her recognition the girl said she first plainly saw his face and his white beard as he half-turned as if to see if he were being followed; while the housekeeper declared she, who had known him for thirty years, could not be mistaken about her master, and there was light enough for her to notice that he was wearing the clothes in which, as Carey got out of her, he must have gone away."

"Carey is satisfied with the identification?" I inquired.

"He cannot doubt it. Mrs. Bichard knows her master better than any one. Besides, the girl saw him first and it was her inarticulate cry that drew Mrs. Bichard to the window. He was thus recognised simultaneously but independently by the two women."

"But surely they went after him?"

"Oh, yes. At least Mrs. Bichard followed at once;

the girl it seems delayed to get on a few more garments. The out-buildings round the end of which they had seen him vanish are close to a grassy lane between high hedges, a lane which if one goes right, passes Mère Trouteaud's cottage and eventually leads down to the seashore, while if you take the left, it joins the main road not far from the church.

" Mrs. Bichard scrambled through the hedge and ran down the bank, but getting no sight of him, waited till the girl arrived and then sent her towards the sea while she herself went along in the other direction, towards the main road. On reaching the main road without overtaking him the housekeeper stopped, again not knowing whether he had gone right or left. She might have taken a chance, but as she had so few clothes on she was a little prudish about being seen by any of the growers driving in to catch the mail boat. So she went back to the house and met Alice returning from her search which had been equally without result. After putting on a few more things the housekeeper went to Tozer's to give him the message which had Carey out at Perigord by seven."

" Did he get anything more ? "

Le Marinel's eyes flickered at the question and he hesitated for a breath or two.

" A little, not much. But he came away with a very definite conviction that we can lay our hands on de Quettville to-night."

" To-night ? "

Le Marinel nodded.

" He is convinced of that from what little he did discover at Perigord. It appears that the girl, Alice, had heard a sound in the house on the previous night. At the time she thought little of it, believing it must be Mrs. Bichard herself. But in the morning Mrs. Bichard found the side door that leads from behind the

staircase into the garden unlocked. Now, mark this. When at home de Quettville always did the locking up himself. He was most precise and careful about it. Systematically he went round the house every night after taking a turn in the garden, and this door was the first he saw to. He would afterwards go to his study, hang the keys on a nail behind the door, mix himself a glass of hot grog from the hot water Mrs. Bichard always took there a minute or so before ten, after which he went up to bed. All this was a sort of ritual which was invariably followed every night.

" Since his disappearance the housekeeper has done the locking up, of course, but the study being itself now locked up by me, she has always left the keys in their separate locks, with the exception of this side door. This key she removed from the lock because it was the one door de Quettville habitually used and for which he had a key on the ring he always carried attached to a chain in his pocket. It was certainly by that door he entered on Saturday night when the housekeeper next morning, finding it open, thought she had removed the key without first turning it in the lock. And as Mrs. Bichard did not mention her omission to the maid, nor the maid speak of hearing that noise in the night, neither of them divined the truth, though Carey saw it when he put the two facts together."

The avocat eyed me expectantly.

" The truth ? " I echoed.

He nodded eagerly.

" Don't you see what it means ? Why, simply that de Quettville has been returning every night *except* the Friday night when we ourselves were there till daylight. Is it not obvious that he supposes himself surrounded by enemies, that he wants something and does not wish to be seen getting it ? If he were in a sane condition he would know that he could come and get what

he wants openly. If it is food or a weapon, or something out of the study, he finds the door locked against him, and not knowing that the key is in my possession, hunts for it elsewhere in the house on successive nights. Well, to-night we shall be waiting for him. To-night, Carey believes, will see an end to all our anxieties."

On that my thoughts flew off in an effort to formulate the new theory necessary to account for Coquard's attack on myself. For a new theory must now be found, since I could not after this suppose the attack had anything to do with de Quettville's disappearance. If that knife came from Coquard's hand it must be on account of some forgotten incident in my Paris days in which Coquard, or more probably one of his friends, had come up against me, some friend whose grudge Coquard had taken up in the approved *apache* manner. More than one nasty row had come my way in those old wild days. There was that half-forgotten ugly incident in the Rue Saint Jacques when knives came out ; and there was also the affair with the two scoundrels whom I found in the dark hours knocking an old beggar woman about on the quai, close to the Petit Pont. They had tried to throw me into the Seine. Neither of these had become police affairs. But the police had been very much in that business near the Odeom when Abercromby and myself, returning from a hospital case, found a gendarme lying on the ground holding on to an arrest while being kicked by four of his captive's pals. In the rough and tumble which followed, one of them tried to plant the toe of his boot under my chin, but I taught him that a boot accustomed to kicking place goals could be landed much lower down with greater accuracy. Hugh Abercromby meanwhile had also dropped his man, or rather his pair ; but in a more genteel fashion, by cracking their heads together. So as the other fellow had bolted, we wound up by

helping the gendarme and the four captives over to the lock-up. Three of them got long sentences while the man they had been attempting to rescue was sent to Devil's Island.

Le Marinel cut into these flying visions of the past with a cough, a nervous little clearing of the throat that caught my attention.

" There's just one thing more," he said, " and that is the apology I have to make you."

" Apology—what for ? " I asked.

" An apology in which Carey joins me. We were both wrong and Sullivant as well, in being so sure de Quettville was dead. You alone believed him to be alive and " —he held up his hand to stop my interruption—" I am to say from Carey that but for his knowledge of the view you have so consistently held, he might never have followed up Mrs. Bichard's message as carefully as he has done.

Had Le Marinel not himself been so uncomfortable in thus having to swallow his own words, he must have seen I was just as uncomfortable myself. For after my visit to the wine shop I had been certain, more certain than any of them, that the man was dead. So I cut short the undeserved apology.

" Never mind about me," I said hastily, " how does Carey propose to catch him ? "

" We're going to lie in wait for him at that side door to-night. Carey is making no search for him to-day. He is too well hidden—some one sheltering him of course—and so no police will go out to-day. No need to scare him off since he will come to that side door himself."

This looked all right if de Quettville remained unaware that he had been seen by the two women, and if he had not got whatever it was he wanted in his own house. A sudden possibility flashed into my mind.

"Suppose this nocturnal visitor were some one impersonating de Quettville?" I said.

The suggestion startled Le Marinel. He stared blankly at me, his eyes a-goggle, vaguely reminding me of an astonished goldfish.

"Impersonating de Quettville," he repeated. "What for?"

"Oh, I don't know."

He came a step nearer.

"But, my friend, what then, made you suggest such a thing?"

"Well, he's the last man who needs to enter Perigord like that, isn't he?"

"Possibly, but you are the last man I'd expect to say that."

"Why?"

"Why, because it's your whole argument that Hilaire de Quettville is a delusional maniac who is hiding because he believes himself surrounded by enemies, one of whom he intends to kill. Is that not so?" he snapped.

And I could not but admit that so it was. Yet when Le Marinel repeated his question as to what had made me suggest impersonation, and found I had no reason to give, he did not like that at all, insisting that I must have had a reason. Then, of course, I saw that the suggestion of impersonation I had hazarded had its source in the suspicion born in the wine shop that de Quettville was dead. And it was the last thing I wanted to tell Le Marinel now, after hearing of his and Carey's admiration for the consistency and tenacity with which I had stuck to it that the old man was alive! Lamely enough then, I told the avocat with a shrug that my suggestion was meant merely to cover all the possibilities. With that, though he eyed me keenly while I spoke, he had to be content.

" Oh, well," he remarked, rising, " to-night will settle everything." He brushed an imaginary speck of dust from his sleeve, adding, " Carey wants to pick you up here soon after ten."

" Me ? He wants me to go out ? "

" Certainly. Aren't you the medical attendant ? Carey must have a doctor by him when the man is taken, and Carey, I can tell you, thinks the world of you now. Though," he went on, holding out his hand, " what he may think of you if this nocturnal visitor turns out not to be de Quettville I can't tell you."

" You can tell me this : has de Quettville ever lived abroad for any length of time ? "

" Abroad ? " Le Marinel repeated vaguely.

" Yes, in South America, say, or the Pacific ? "

" Heavens, no ! He's the regular old type Guernsey-man, to whom Guernsey is the centre of the universe. I doubt if he's been more than twice to England in all his life. Why do you ask that ? "

But I was not prepared to tell him that just then.

" Oh, I merely wondered. Travel has its influence on the mind, you know," I said as we reached the door and my eye took a furtive glance at the narrow and deep incision near the edge of the right panel.

And as I sat down to my delayed breakfast my thoughts did not turn on the possibility of a fall in the Chief Constable's new-found esteem for me, nor did I doubt for a moment that the man we should capture that night would be de Quettville. On the contrary out of the very certainty that it must be de Quettville a new perplexity arose : why had the knife been aimed at *me* ?

CHAPTER XI

HOW WE CAUGHT DE QUETTVILLE

ALL through that day that question kept recurring. As it chanced Monday brought a good number of professional calls, but while going from one house to another I could think of little else. That knife stuck in my mind all day, quivering. For the trouble now was to find a motive. Why should such an attack be made upon a harmless medical *locum tenens*? Le Marinel's news that de Quettville was still alive and at large necessarily altered my whole perspective. Knowing what I did of the perversions in judgment and conduct which accompany delusional insanity, I now saw that far and away the most likely person to have made the attack was not Coquard but de Quettville himself. That maniac whom I had seen lying in his bed at Perigord, brooding over his wrongs till his disordered brain flared up into homicidal intent, had included me in the number of his persecutors.

That he had disliked me at the time of my visit I was well aware, but now I could divine the maniacal fury which lay behind those vigorous heart-pulsations on which I had remarked to Le Marinel. He then, of course, had regarded me as the one man likely to thwart his homicidal purpose by getting him put under restraint, and from my experience of delusional dementia I was aware how easily his hatred could be temporarily transferred from the original object of his hate to myself. The workings of a disordered mind are hard to follow, but it is an error to suppose that an insane person cannot conceive and adhere to a purpose. There *is* method in

madness; and with homicidal lunatics the doctor frequently becomes an object of intense hatred, the first enemy who must be removed before the original murderous intention can be achieved.

The more I thought of it the clearer it seemed to become that in this respect de Quettville's case was similar to others known to me. Even his sudden disappearance now became explicable; he had gone into hiding immediately after my visit because he dreaded another visit from a medical man. If, as seemed probable, the original object of his hate was his brother-in-law, Cæsar Brisson, and he had seen me leaving the wine shop while he himself was lurking about the dark quay, he would insanely suppose Brisson and myself to be in conspiracy against him. So the knife had come my way first simply because I was the first to leave the wine shop.

The one flaw in all this seemed to lie in the fact that, so far as I had been able to learn from my question to Le Marinel, de Quettville never had lived where the art of throwing the knife could be acquired. For a long time that day this bothered me. True, he had shown no great skill in the art, for the knife had missed me, but the real trouble was to account for his using such a method at all. For long I could make nothing of this problem. Then I recalled what Le Marinel had said about de Quettville's ancestry, and a clue to that problem came.

Normans who had not come over with the Conqueror, he had called the de Quettvilles. Well, now in the hour of his collapse down in the deep unconscious mind where primitive man lurks in the dark, some ancestor had awakened from the sleep of ages and Hilaire had thrown the knife just as his Norse forefathers had formerly thrown the spear.

That was it! And once the psychological explanation

of the knife throwing became apparent it was easy to explain away the telephone call of the previous night. That call was a mere hoax of the common kind; the car had not come simply because it was all hoax, and but for the knife incident no one would ever have taken it for anything else.

Having reached this unsensational conclusion it will be supposed that my next act was to wire my friend McNab, cancelling my letter. This, however, I did not do, and to this day I am unable to give a rational reason as to why I did not. Possibly some ancestor of my own whose experiences lived on in my own unconscious, whispered a vague warning that stayed my hand. Possibly it was simply because I had dwelt in my letter so much on the island's charm that I felt that to withdraw my invitation would make me seem not to want McNab now that he could be of no professional service to me. Moreover, I knew that once we had the de Quettville case off my mind, McNab and I could have a fine, care-free time together, swimming and sea fishing or playing golf at L'Ancresse. With these anticipations before me I found myself in a cheerful frame of mind when just after nightfall the Chief Constable's car slid up to the front door.

Carey himself was at the wheel, with Sergeant Torode behind, and we moved off at once.

"Le Marinel offered you my apologies?" Carey said after a little.

"Oh, yes," I said, hastily adding, "it was only natural you should prefer Dr. Sullivant's opinion to a stranger's."

Carey replied with quick vexation.

"Sullivant was a fool. So was I."

"Where is Le Marinel now?" I asked, partly to get away from the awkward moment, partly because I had expected the avocat to accompany us.

" At Perigord. We are to meet him at an arranged place when he'll bring us the latest news. Our plan for catching de Quettville will depend on what he has to tell us," he added, as if warning me not to bother him with more questions.

It was a hint I took, content to leave plans in the hands of the police and, confident that the end of my professional responsibility for de Quettville would soon be over, I yielded myself to the exhilaration of a night ride in a fast moving car.

The route taken was certainly not the most direct way to Perigord. That I let pass without remark, as we headed down the Rohais on the long slope out of the town. Soon we were on a country road, raked by our headlights, with the trees flashing towards us out of the blackness at an ever increasing speed. At Cobo, almost as soon as the white-washed cottages leaped into radiancy we turned sharp left, following the coast line, along a bare and open road that would lead us ultimately to the mighty headland of Pleimont. The road was empty of all traffic, but now and then at some row of cottages facing seawards our lights would reveal for a second or two a group of figures in fisherman's jerseys either leaning in lazy relaxation against the sea wall or sitting on it with legs swinging as they watched us pass.

By this time Colonel Carey's prolonged silence arrested my attention, and it became increasingly obvious that he had something on his mind. His silence, in fact, on that empty road brought something of a chill to my own good spirits. Certainly his worries would not, like my own, come to an end with de Quettville's capture. He intended, I knew, to get not only at the identity of the person who had been sheltering the man, but also to discover the identity of the persons responsible for his mental condition through the use

they had made of the ship's figure-head taken from Mère Trouteaud's garden. But possibly, the thought came, he had penetrated these mysteries, or at least, as was more likely now, knew just enough of what lay behind to fill his mind with some anxiety and set all his nerves on edge.

Rounding the L'Eree corner which opens out the great bay of Rocquaine, I caught sight of a low-hung moon then just clearing a long stretch of cloud that topped the massive black Pleinmont headland. Carey slowed the car down to a crawl and shut off all our lights. The engine's note was now so soft that it was almost lost in the gentle swishing of the tide beyond the wall. Inland one saw no more than an extended smear of intense darkness, punctured at rare intervals by a small luminous oblong made by a lighted cottage window. To the south, however, beyond the huge mass of Pleinmont, the escaping moon was turning the sea into a long streak of glimmering quicksilver amid which the jet-black rocks scattered around the Hanois light-house lay like a herd of sea monsters asleep.

Then just as I was thinking, the lighthouse itself seemed to be flashing hasty warnings from the midst of that dangerous flock, we turned off the road and began to nose up and up a narrow lane beset with high hedges. Five minutes later Carey swung through an open gate into a field and the car came to a halt between two haystacks, the radiator touching the hedge in front. Carey at once relaxed.

"So far so good," he said. "But the devil of it all is that all this would have been needless if only we had listened to you."

"You mean about de Quettville's conditions?"

"Yes, we gave up the search for him too soon, or rather Sullivant with his theory of suicide sent us looking in the wrong places."

So while we sat waiting for *Le* Marinel's arrival, Sergeant Torode having already gone to the gate to watch for him, I told the Chief Constable of the knife throwing incident. In doing this what I had in my mind was to show him that a determined and obstinate man like de Quettville was not all of the type who take to suicide as a means of escape from troubles. But my story certainly made Carey sit up. At first I thought he was stiff from incredulity; but, fortunately, his experiences in the by-ways of Indian crime had left Carey with a mind which few things could surprise. He fastened, however, on exactly those two features in the affair which had at first puzzled me: why had the attack been made on me, and why had such a method been used? But my theories on both points he found convincing.

"You have had personal knowledge of his type?" he asked.

"Personal experience," I amended. "And you can take it that no more determined will exists than the will of a homicidal maniac. And it's well to keep in mind," I added, "that the cunning he develops is only second to that determination."

"Yes," Carey said musingly. "That is clear in this case, anyhow. Apart from any impulse derived from his Norse blood, he knew better than to get at close quarters with a man of your physique. And after he missed he had to evade you and recover the knife which was perhaps the only weapon he had. He knew or guessed he could not escape you if he ran."

"So he quietly steps into the next gate and lets me go blundering past," I wound up, sore with the remembrance.

But Carey's thought had moved on.

"This must modify my plans for to-night. The thing is even more hazardous than I thought. You had better

say nothing to Le Marinel. The little man would be scared out of his wits." He laughed softly, adding, " I'll bet he'd never come down that dark lane alone if he knew."

" Has he far to come ? "

" Fortunately no. Perigord stands up there on the top of the ridge ahead. The lane we left is the lane Mrs. Bichard saw de Quettville making for when she watched him from the girl's bedroom, and it drops down past Mère Trouteaud's cottage, which is about a hundred yards nearer here."

As time passed, however, I began to wonder. Carey too began to show signs of uneasiness or impatience, glancing at the luminous dial of his wrist watch at more frequent intervals. By now the moon had cleared the headland and I could see its pale light filtering through the hedge and flooding the field beyond. The pungent smell of hay was everywhere. It must have been well after midnight when a creak as from a gate being opened made us both sit up simultaneously. Presently Le Marinel's face, looking strangely pale in the shadow of the hayrick, appeared alongside.

" All right ? " Carey asked eagerly in a whisper.

" I think so," the avocat responded. " You are sure you have not been seen ? "

When Carey told him we had taken all the precautions they had arranged and had got there before the moon rose, Le Marinel jumped up into the back seat followed by Sergeant Torode. In the rapid discussion which followed Carey seemed to me unduly anxious about my safety. Whether or no this was the result of the story I had just told him I could not decide, but he would not allow me to take the part originally assigned me in the prearranged plan for de Quettville's capture. And this deviation seemed to irritate Le Marinel. In his precise lawyer's mind he objected, I suppose, to

any late change to the cut and dried scheme already devised. But Carey was firm.

"No," he said with finality. "You and Dunn will stay inside. Torode and myself remain outside in the garden, under cover, where we can watch the approach to the side door. That will allow us to see whether de Quettville is alone or whether he is being made use of by others."

"Made use of by others? What others? What use?" the lawyer asked after a moment.

"That's what we don't know. But it's a certainty that some one knows more about de Quettville than he has told, since some one is at least feeding him. That is the fact which has set me *thinking*, Le Marinel."

Le Marinel said nothing for a moment, but I heard him stirring on the back seat.

"Thinking what?" he inquired at length.

"Well, whether something nasty doesn't lie behind the several odd features in the affair."

"My dear Carey, isn't that rather fantastic? Remember, you are no longer in India," the avocat protested, half-amused.

"Well," Carey replied soberly, "that Neptune was fantastic enough and the gilded tennis balls and one or two other odd events which may mean much or little. What is certain is that *some one* is concealing de Quettville, either because de Quettville can put compulsion on him or because he is using de Quettville for some purpose of his own."

"Is that the only reason you have for reversing our different posts?" Le Marinel inquired.

"It is. Instead of the sergeant and myself waiting behind the door it will be you and Dunn. And now," Carey finished crisply, "it's time we were moving."

We mounted the grassy lane in single file and not till we reached the top where the gable of the Perigord

stables met the lane was another word spoken. Entering the grounds through the gap in the hedge we were still in the shadow cast by the stable wall, and while Carey drew Le Marinel aside for final instructions before we separated, I had a look round the end of the wall at what lay beyond.

The house stood about a hundred yards distant and slightly to our left, so that I could see the greater part of the eastern end in shadow and all its southern frontage white in the moonlight. From where I stood the main door in the western front, approached from the northern boundary of the estate, was not visible, but the path before me, bisecting what must have once been a fine broad lawn, led to a small door in the southern front which I knew must be the door that was to be kept under observation. And I noticed that there was just one position from which this door could be watched from behind cover.

The lawn between me and the house which on my right extended till it merged indefinitely with the tree-studded park, terminated on the left at a ridge of rising ground which ran from the hedge right up to the far end of the house. The highest point in this ridge, which was quite near to the house, was occupied by a summer house, the top of which was plainly discernible among a clump of surrounding shrubs and bushes. Here, though it seemed to face south so as to permit a view of the sea over the top of the hedge which bordered the lane, I felt sure was the place from which Carey and the sergeant would keep watch on the door. It was not merely a good place: that small grove of bushes among which I could also just see the tall stone pillar on which the figure of Neptune had been for a time set, was the only place. And, in fact, it was to the summer house on the knoll that the other two turned when Le Marinel led me in a quick dash across the moon-lit lawn, right

up to the side door. Once inside I heard him lock the door and remove the key.

Only a vague impression of the interior at that place remained with me, for I had never been near this door. What I did remember was that one reached the side door by a rather narrow passage leading from the hall, and that the slope of the second flight of main staircase formed the roof of this passage. But what I now saw as Le Marinel taking my arm, flashed a hand torch before us, was that just inside the door there was a deep open alcove exactly the width of the stairs which passed overhead. Le Marinel gave me time to see two chairs side by side in the alcove before switching off his torch. We sat down to recover breath. After a little Le Marinel touched me.

"You've got hold of the idea?" he whispered interrogatively.

"I think so. We are to collar him when he enters and the others are to close in from behind."

"You've seen him; he's not very big. Would it not be better for me simply to light him up for you with the torch? I know that was what Carey meant to do while the sergeant tackled him."

Now it was true that I had seen de Quettville, and though I had not seen him on his feet I had little doubt of my ability, violent though a maniac can be, to lay him on the floor, provided I caught him unawares. Whether I could keep him there depended on the quick following up of Carey and the sergeant. And Le Marinel sounded rather nervous.

"All right," I said; "just be sure to throw the light full in his eyes. Then I'll take him low down and when he's on the ground we can both sit on him."

He sighed in relief.

"Of course he's quite old, as you know."

That I did know, but I also knew the almost super-

natural strength which comes to a maniac of any age, and I wondered what might happen if de Quettville took it into his head to lock the door behind him as soon as he entered. My thoughts turned on my Braxsted days; and it was not good at that moment to remember Braxsted. In spite of me I recalled one man, not a young man either who had torn the iron bars of his window with his naked hands as if they had been made of soft lead. The only difference age seems to make in such cases is in the time the paroxysm of superhuman strength lasts. Resolutely I turned my thoughts away from the possibilities before me when the moment came and I could hear the key turning in the lock of that door.

McNab would be on the sea now, if he were coming at all, that is. My letter would not reach him till some time after eight, too late for a reply. Mentally I went over what I had written, re-estimating its powers of attraction for him, and I saw it must draw him if he happened to be free. Then I began to speculate as to the precise amount of annoyance he would show when told that the suspicions which prompted my letter were unfounded, that the problem was merely that of securing a homicidal maniac, and that there was no case for him at all.

After that I found myself hoping either that he would not come or that there might be something in Carey's notion of some person using the madman for some hidden purpose of his own. This last would offer McNab something to do and save my face, even though McNab declined the offer. All the same, I hoped Carey and his sergeant would not, after de Quettville entered the house, spend much time scouring the gardens for this possible second man. Not much reliance could be placed on Le Marinel! Already my ear had taken note of the way in which his chair creaked, as if he were fidgeting

about with his nerves getting jumpy in the dark. Yet he probably had no experience of how dangerous a man in de Quettville's mental condition can become in moments of crisis. I bent over towards him.

"It is quite safe to talk here, is it not?"

He assented, as with eager relief.

"Oh, yes, I think so, if we keep our ears open too. After all," he added, "there's only four women in the house."

"Four?"

"Yes, Mrs. Blampied and Clare came to-night—in Clare's interests, you know." He tittered a little breathlessly. "We may expect other godchildren very soon, and no doubt Cæsar Brisson too, in his daughter's interests, for none of them know de Quettville is alive. Carey of course swore Mrs. Bichard and Alice to secrecy to give us this chance of getting him to-night."

"Then the housekeeper knows we are here now?"

"No. Carey would take no risks, and I slipped out only when they had all gone up to bed, leaving me at work in the study."

"You haven't finished with those papers yet?"

This I fancy was said merely for the sake of keeping up the talk. But Le Marinel seemed eager to talk. Again he laughed very softly.

"*Ma foi*, no! For a lawyer there's weeks, perhaps months of work there. But that will come later. At the moment the concern of Mrs. Blampied and all the godchildren is to discover whether a will has been made, and if so where it is. They are, of course, all most positive that a will must exist, since they know he hates Brisson with such rancour that he would most certainly never allow his daughter Judith to inherit more than he can help. Oh, they have great expectations, these godchildren, expectations which assuredly were encouraged by their godfather."

"But," I said, interested in spite of the anxiety of the moment, "so far you have found no will."

Le Marinel snapped his fingers.

"On the contrary I found it this afternoon, hidden in a recess behind the picture over the fireplace. Indeed I found more, for in the same place I found the draft of a mortgage de Quettville has been arranging on the Perigord estate."

"A mortgage! He was not so wealthy then?" I said at haphazard, my ear on a sound. I fancied it came from the outside. The lawyer in Le Marinel seemed to have mastered the man; he was for the moment too full of the legal side of the case to care for any other. Again he snapped his fingers.

"Poof, you do not yet appreciate the humour of the situation," he said. "His intention, since he could neither sell nor will away Perigord, clearly was to mortgage it up to the hilt so that Brisson's girl would inherit a quite worthless estate. Some rumour of this appears to have got around, and that doubtless is what has made Mrs. Blampied and the others so eager to see his will."

"But the man is still alive," I said, very conscious of the fact.

"Ah, but they do not know that. Neither do they know how unlikely they are to benefit even if he were dead."

"Because after all he has left them out! Another touch of his cynical humour, I suppose."

"Not at all. He has left them everything. But the will is dated on the fifteenth of this month, that is two days before Clare Blampied came on her visit, and actually while his earliest godchild, George Drury, was here. So the question will arise: was he *sane* at the time the will was executed? Some pickings for the lawyers there! Now *we* know——" Le Marinel pulled

up an instant before my warning hand touched him. His ear had also caught the sound. In his professional excitement he had begun to talk rather loudly. Instinctively I had risen and stood listening. The sound came again. But this time I knew it came from somewhere inside the house, somewhere up the passage leading to the hall. It sounded exactly like wood creaking sharply under the weight of a footstep. Then Le Marinel gave me a surprise.

" I'm going to see what that is," he whispered as we stood listening. He moved off at once up the passage, leaving me taken aback by this unexpected display of pluck. To be candid, my own nerve had not held out so well. And I could not help seeing that his had improved, so to speak, as the night advanced. It was true he had, in talking over the legal aspects of the case, freed his mind from the strain I felt in having to listen for the first signs of de Quettville's approach. And after all his job was merely to hold the torch while I overpowered the madman, a thing the lawyer in his ignorance no doubt considered would be easy for me.

I stood forward to listen, one ear on the door, the other on the passage that led into the hall But from neither direction could any sound be detected, and my thought then was that if de Quettville were as soft-footed as the avocat there was need for even greater alertness than before. There must be no more talk when he returned.

Of course, I soon thought I heard sounds after standing listening a few minutes. Somewhere in the house I seemed to detect a door being gently shut, and down the dark, narrow passage there came the sound of voices whispering continuously together. Yet though I knew all this was mere imagination, or if actual sound a thing which could be more sanely explained by the springing up of a night breeze, a puff of air sufficient

to move an open window or flutter some foliage—though I told myself all this the feeling of uneasiness remained. And as time passed and Le Marinel did not return that feeling deepened. At any moment now I might hear de Quettville's key in the lock. Le Marinel knew that too. Why did he not come back? Was it because he could not, because something had happened to him? It could hardly be that, since in the vast stillness of the house and with my senses on the stretch, no smothered outcry nor a fall, not even a stumble over a piece of furniture could have passed unheard.

Then I got angry with myself. After all, Le Marinel would not be of much use, and Carey and the sergeant would be following up if they were not engaged in catching the man suspected of being behind de Quettville. In any case I felt sure I could hold on to the madman, no matter how he bit or kicked. Still, I could not free myself from the influence of that house. Had my watch been kept in a suburban villa at, say, Ealing, I would have felt nothing; but that rambling house, old, empty and uncared for, had an atmosphere to which no one could have been insensitive. It felt at that hour of the night as if it were full of things that peeped at me round corners and muttered and whispered together. Then something came padding quickly down the passage. I drew back.

"*Hist*, where are you?" Le Marinel breathed.

"Here," I answered; "but where the devil have you been all this time?"

He felt for his chair and sat down.

"All over the house. That noise was nothing—the stairs creaking in the way old wood does when the weather changes. Even a change of wind does it." He began to put on his shoes, and added, "I came as soon as I could."

"You came down the passage as though something

were after you," I blurted out. But my annoyance was short lived; I was too glad to have him there once more.

"Oh, well," he replied as he sat up, "that was easy; the keyhole gave me the line."

Turning to the door I saw what he meant. By this time the moon had moved so far round that a thin ray of its light, entering by the keyhole, terminated on the floor in a small but very bright spot, like a new sixpence with a tail to it. It was this that had guided Le Marinel straight down the passage, and his eyes still seemed to be on it, for he said half-musingly, as if to himself:

"It will go out when he puts the key in the lock."

Le Marinel, of course, did not dream how those words had power to stir my imagination. He did not know what had happened when I had put the key in the lock of my own door and how nearly my own light had gone out as I did so!

After that we sat on side by side in silence. Le Marinel seemed rather fatigued; his breathing soon suggested he was dropping into a doze. I left him alone; a touch would be enough when the moment came. As for myself, that little spot of moonlight on the floor I found most helpful, for it relieved the strain of constant vigilance by permitting me to transfer the strain from one sense to another, from hearing, that is, to sight. For a while it served to keep me wakeful too; its slow creeping across the floor was something to watch, the only thing that moved in a world in which even time itself seemed to stand still.

Perhaps sleep had surprised me. I do remember shutting my eyes to transfer my watch from the eye to the ear. And my belief was that I had only closed my eyes for no more than a few seconds when something made me look up. The little spot of moonlight had moved altogether off the floor and was now come way up the opposite wall. But for it to have progressed so

far hours must have passed. In a flash, however, I knew this was wrong. The light was not on the wall at all. That was not wall-paper on which it shone, but cloth—cloth of a narrow black and white stripe.

A man was standing there, doing something, just inside the door. With a shout to the sleeping Le Marinel I leaped for the man. But he was too quick for me. Missing him as he side-stepped, I went against the door with a bang. Le Marinel, awakened by the sudden clamour, emitted a scream shrilly, like a woman. As I shouted to him to bring his torch to bear there came a rush of feet, and remembering the knife, I ducked and the man went down over me, with my right hand closed on an ankle. But kicking himself free, he sent me sprawling, and this gave him time to be first on his feet.

Le Marinel appeared to have quite lost his head, and I dared not again call for the light as I was certain my shout would be followed by a knife throw. I stood still, doubtful where de Quettville was, and as I stood breathing hard a whiff of perfume came from somewhere. I did not think then of the incongruity, but merely concluded it was carried my way by a current of air from the door. If so, that roll on the floor had reversed our positions, mine, for now I found myself at the entrance to the passage, with de Quettville presumably near the door. To be candid, I sickened at the thought of that knife sinking unexpectedly into some part of my body in the darkness. It would be easier to overpower him in the open, let him get out again. This, however, I couldn't do for now in our reversed positions he was between me and the door. Carey had been mighty slow as it was in following up.

But then there came a hail from the garden and a rain of blows on the door. I felt just a little bitter. If they had not been asleep de Quettville would not have had time to lock that door behind him. But this was

unfair; had I not been asleep myself? Simultaneously with this battering on the door another of us seemed to awake, and Le Marinel's torch at last flashed out. Unfortunately it flashed on me, and as I stood blinded by it for the moment and inactive, something came at me that struck me down, though I do not remember going to the floor.

When I opened my eyes again it was to find myself lying on a bed in full daylight. And by the bed sat Le Marinel—a very dejected looking Le Marinel. He did not see I had come round. I put out my hand and touched him. He fairly jumped at that touch.

"Why the devil did you turn the light on me?" I asked. It hurt my jaw horribly to speak and I felt sick too, but that question I had to get out. La Marinel regarded me with woe and shame.

"I didn't know which of you was which. That is why I hesitated so long." While I pondered over this he added bitterly: "And in the end I guessed wrong."

"Why didn't Carey——?"

He noticed my hand go to my jaw and nodded sympathetically.

"Ah, that's where he got you with the chair. It isn't broken, I hope."

His disgust with his own share in the scrimmage was so plainly written on his face that I could not keep up my anger. And it obviously was a fact that it was impossible for him to tell de Quettville from myself after that mix-up in the dark. He might hear each of us breathing heavily after the first tumble on the floor, but it was too much to expect him to distinguish the breathing of one from the breathing of the other. And, after all, Carey and the sergeant had failed much more seriously; they had been much too slow in following up de Quettville when he arrived at the house. Perhaps they also were asleep! If so, I was certainly not to

blame for that, as I possibly was for allowing Le Marinel to drop off.

"Carey was very angry with me too," Le Marinel remarked lugubriously.

"What for?"

"For not unlocking the door and letting them in."

"They should have followed up quicker and not given him the chance of locking them out," I declared.

The avocat opened his eyes wide.

"Oh, but—well, you see de Quettville did not enter by that door at all."

"What!"

"I thought you knew. I'm afraid I myself dozed off."

"If you were asleep how did you know?"

"Because Carey told me—after de Quettville had got away by the study window, the way he came in."

This brought me upright, aghast.

"Don't tell me they didn't catch him!"

But that was what he did tell me. And bad hearing it made. He added that de Quettville had been seen running across the fields towards Pleinmont by two fishermen. The two fishermen, one of them my old acquaintance, Daniel Sarchet, were returning home after a night's fishing off the Hanois. That was a few minutes after 4 a.m., for they had just heard the hour striking on the church clock. Since then Carey had organised a search, and Le Marinel said all the men in the parish, and some of the women, were now scouring the cliffs for him.

So, hoping against hope, we hung on for news. The knock out I had taken came, fortunately for me, from the padded edge of the chair, and I could have returned to St. Peter Port in the forenoon, but I was unwilling to leave at that juncture. About ten o'clock, however, I walked to the local post office and rang up to see if any calls had come in. No calls had come in, but the housekeeper went on to say that the friend I had said

might be coming had arrived by the mail boat that morning.

The receiver nearly dropped from my hand. McNab —I had forgotten him! At the back of my mind I suppose there had been all along the belief that he would be too busy to come. Meanwhile, the housekeeper's voice was telling me the gentleman had gone out to send off a telegram and so could not speak with me then. This relieved me. I would not have known how to tell him there was now no case to investigate. But after a moment's thought I told her to send McNab out to Perigord when he returned. After all, although there was no crime involved in the affair, there was perhaps just enough mystery to save my face with him. As I rang off I remember even hoping that de Quettville would not be caught before McNab turned up at Perigord.

But that hope was not fulfilled.

About eleven, while I was loitering in the drive waiting for McNab, an excited fisherman hurried up with news. Hilaire de Quettville's body had just been taken out of the sea.

CHAPTER XII

MCNAB TAKES A HAND

IT was Colonel Carey the man had come to find. So after eliciting from him enough of the facts to be certain de Quettville was far beyond my help, I told the excited fisherman that the Chief Constable would be found somewhere on the cliffs beyond Pleinmont. I was aware that Carey would want me to view the body; but for a moment or two I stood where the man left me, stunned

by the unexpectedness of his news. I felt more than a little abashed, too, in recognising that, as the event proved, de Quettville's tendencies must have been suicidal, not homicidal. Sullivant had been right after all!

What would Carey say now? For myself, the professional mortification I then experienced was tempered by the conviction that my opinion had been founded on the evidence and facts available to me. And reviewing those facts as I turned away to make for the lane that led down to the beach, I did not see how I could have come to any other conclusion. Unless there was some flaw somewhere, Sullivant's opinion could have been nothing but a guess. It was against the weight of the evidence, unless, I repeated to myself, there was some flaw somewhere. For, to take but the psychological factor in the case, it was preposterous to suppose that a man like de Quettville could be mocked into self-destruction by a ridiculous ship's figure-head placed over his gate. This man was no stranger to public ridicule. From the day his fiancée fled to the day his brother-in-law set up his pub and called it Perigord, he had supped his fill of mockery. He lived alone; why should he be sensitive to public opinion? He must have become impervious to shame too, not only because he was merciless to his debtors but even to be a usurer at all. If there ever had been any softness in him the memory of it had vanished from men's minds, and for what he now was they saw him, a hard, embittered, unlovely, vindictive man whose whole bent and bias was for retaliation. He had always hit back. Even his practice of usury was a method of hitting back. He had hit back at me fiercely enough. Yet he wound up by taking refuge in suicide! That was an act so out of line with his whole past that, if a fact, it made one doubt whether anything like a science of psychology could exist.

At this point when I had almost crossed the lawn, a series of raucous hoots on a klaxon horn made me look back. A car had halted some way short of the house, and a man in grey, standing up, was waving to me. McNab of course! I retraced my steps at the run. Not that I was overjoyed to see him; I was entirely uncomfortable. I ran simply because it was my duty to see the body at once, even though I had not yet been officially summoned. So, our first greetings over and the car dismissed, I took McNab's arm and started a hasty explanation.

"Afraid your first day won't be much of a holiday," I began.

"Holiday?" he echoed, much as if he had never before heard the word.

"Well," I said brazenly, "the case I wrote about has setttled itself, so you'll have nothing to do but enjoy yourself. Ever been here before?"

I felt him stiffen. He replied to my question with another.

"Please explain, will you?"

"Oh, it's simple. The man is dead—drowned himself this morning. In fact, I'm on my way to view the body now."

He withdrew his arm and pulling up short, eyed me almost sternly. In a moment, however, his mouth twitched at the corners.

"You're very uncomfortable about something," he said. "Is it because you have dragged me here for nothing?"

"Yes," I admitted frankly. "Only I hope you won't think it's for nothing. After all, there are few places so restful and interesting for a holiday, and," I added, affecting to scan him with a professionally critical eye, "you look as if you needed one."

"Look here," he said, gripping my arm, "did *any*

one throw a knife at you, or was that a hallucination due to your own obvious need of a rest ? "

This got my back up all right. I told him that not only was the knife thrown in the manner I had described, but that he could presently see the man who had thrown it. To this he replied in his ironical fashion that since he was there against his will on a restful holiday, he did not propose to spoil it by a post-mortem inspection of de Quettville. Still, he would be interested to hear about the man.

So, as we walked down the grassy lane towards the seashore I told him the story, from the night when Le Marinel sent me out to Perigord to see his client, up to our watch for him throughout the previous night. No doubt I could have told the story better in other circumstances ; but at any rate, in telling it hurriedly as I then had to do, I did not gloss over my own mistakes and far-fetched suspicions. These last indeed, I was at pains to stress, since they were the only justification I had for sending that letter to himself. But I suppose McNab was familiar with people who harboured unfounded suspicions ; for when from time to time I stole a glance at his face I could detect no outward sign of amusement. At any rate, not after the earlier part of the story in which I gave an account of the Neptune in the night-cap, shirt and trident set over the same gate through which his own taxi had entered.

But there was time for little more than a bare outline of the facts before we emerged from the lane and crossed the road to the sea wall. From there it was not hard to find the place I had to find. Round a rude boathouse on the beach below us a small crowd of people stood about in little groups. Seeing this, and anticipating that my own duty need not detain me more than a few minutes, I suggested to McNab that he could sit on the sea wall till I returned.

" No," he said. " I'll come with you, if you think this Colonel Carey won't mind."

I did not think Carey would object to any one who came in my company, but it surprised me to perceive that McNab had altered his mind about seeing the body. While threading our way through the motley groups of talking women, fisherfolk and farm hands, most of them too interested with all their heads together to notice us, I overheard a man explain that the body had come in on the flood tide exactly at the spot where Mère Trouteaud had pulled out the Neptune. Mère Trouteaud herself I did not see, but Daniel Sarchet was there, and pulled a forelock as I passed. He had a portentious look on his weather-worn face, and nodded with solemnity as if to remind me that here was a fulfilment of all the ill-fortune he and the old woman had predicted for de Quettville on the day of the *clameur*.

Inside the boat-house we found Sergeant Torode and the local constable with the three fishermen who had brought the body up from the water's edge. The sergeant in the act of showing the fishermen out after having taken their separate statements, seemed surprised to see me.

" We did not think you would be well enough to come. When we left you didn't look like it," he said, his eyes going to McNab with some curiosity.

Explaining that all I had got was no more than a knock out with what was the equivalent of a padded glove, my own eyes went to the sodden figure of the man on the floor who had laid me out in the early morning. They had placed him on a brown folded sail and had folded his arms across the breast. There was dignity and power, more power than I had expected in that long, straight form. He looked, with the pointed white beard lying on his breast, much as one of his Viking ancestors must have looked, like a drowned sea king. For

death had brought to his features a calmness and dignity, a certain air of majesty, which had not been there in life.

" We are expecting the Chief and Dr. Sullivant any minute now," Torode whispered.

" Oh, you have sent for Dr. Sullivant ? "

" Chief's run in in his car for him, having, as I said, no idea you'd be fit, sir. But he'd certainly want you to be present, if possible, the deceased having been your patient."

Now I was not specially anxious to meet Dr. Sullivant again ; but I certainly was still less anxious to seem to avoid meeting him. Besides, I was aware that the procedure followed in these islands differed from English practice, and did not know how far professional obligations extended. So we stayed on. Presently a car came to a halt on the road above.

In bare justice to Sullivant it must be recorded that if he felt any elation over me in finding his prediction of suicide fulfilled he gave me no outward sign of it. On the contrary, Carey having evidently acquainted him with the knock out I had taken last night, he was as full of kindly solicitous inquiries as the Chief himself.

While Sullivant and Torode were at work I quietly introduced McNab to Carey as a friend of mine, in his own line of business, who had come over for a holiday. Carey rather boggled over the holiday assertion, and the half-reproachful look he gave me suggested that I had called in McNab because I did not trust them. However, I left them beginning to talk shop together when Sullivant quietly called me over to his side. He seemed slightly perplexed.

It was Sullivant's job, of course, to decide not only that the man was dead but also to state the cause of death. And if the first was a formality the second was not, since, however apparently obvious the cause may be, it is never taken for granted by any medical man. For

a man whose body is recovered from the sea may have died not from asphyxiation but from many other causes such as syncope, exhaustion, apoplexy, shock or injuries received before submersion. And as presently appeared, Sullivant's difficulty was to determine the exact cause of death. Motioning Torode to resume the pressure he had been applying to the chest, he called on me to look.

" There is no froth," he said.

The presence of froth which can be expelled from the nostrils is absolute proof of death by drowning. Yet the amount of the froth is in proportion to the duration and intensity of the struggle made in the water. And when I reminded Sullivant that if de Quettville entered the water voluntarily there was unlikely to be any struggle, he at once agreed.

" He was most certainly alive when he entered the water," he said, indicating the left forearm. In this I concurred, for on the arm as elsewhere *cutis anserina* was plainly visible, and " goose-skin " is due to the contraction of the skin caused by the sudden cold, which of course only a living body can feel.

" His heart was good too," I said.

Sullivant nodded.

" All right. Asphyxia is what I'll sign for."

At this Carey stepped closer.

" Time of death ? " he queried.

The question was quite formal, since we had the direct testimony of the fisherman as to the time he was seen making for the seashore. But just as I had seen Sullivant with Torode's help punctiliously examine the body for marks of external violence, although it was practically certain the man had walked into the water, so now on the question of time Carey wanted an equal thoroughness. Sullivant, holding his hand against the body for a little, then fingered the eyelid.

" Well," he said thoughtfully, " the temperature is

certainly very low, not unduly so for one of his thinness and age, while on the other hand rigidity has not yet begun. Not less than six hours dead, I'd say—six to eight hours possibly."

Carey glanced down at his watch.

"Eleven thirty now. If we said seven hours that would make it about the time he was seen going across the fields to the sea."

Sergeant Torode coughed deferentially.

"And there's his own watch, sir," he said, "it's old and would stop quickly in the water."

The sergeant, who had charge of the clothes and personal property found in them, here produced the watch. It was a gold hunting watch, and Carey after flicking it open, held it up for inspection. The hands of the watch had stopped at 4.16. Sullivant's extreme estimate had been out by only fourteen minutes! He looked pleased with himself.

"A mere guess though"—he nodded—"a mere lucky guess. I might have been out by hours for all there is to go by."

This seemed to bring the proceedings to an end. Carey held out the watch to his sergeant and Torode, busy with his papers, did not observe the outstretched hand. McNab took over the watch.

"May I look at it?" he asked, like one conscious that he had no real right to be there.

The watch, as I have said, was a gold hunter, old fashioned but good in the old-fashioned way, and as I now saw, perfectly plain on both sides. There was, in fact, nothing, no monogram or decoration, to show which side one must open to expose the dial. And McNab, unlike Carey, guessed wrong, for he opened the back instead of the front. But his head went down as if he had come on something unexpected, almost startling. After a moment he held out the watch to Carey.

" That is worth looking at, I think," he said.

We crowded round. Inside the case, flattened over one of the keyholes was a dark, feathery fragment which Carey moved deliberately with his fore-finger.

" 'M—ye-s," he said; " seaweed. That, by itself, would prove he had been in the sea, even if we didn't already know it."

I remember McNab's stare as he heard this. Carey's tone had a touch of raillery in it. My own thought was that McNab's find, in so far as it proved what needed no proof, was in that respect exactly like Sullivant's estimate of the time at which de Quettville was drowned. And the truth is, I had begun to be uneasy about that guess of Sullivant's. If I kept that uneasiness to myself it was entirely due to the remembrance of my own previous bad guesses.

So I was thinking, when McNab, watch in hand, turned to Torode.

" Have you the key ? "

" No, sir. That wasn't among the personal possessions found on the deceased," Torode replied.

" It hardly would be," Carey said. " People with the old style watches usually keep the key in their bed-rooms, where they do the winding up at bedtime."

" Exactly," McNab said, handing back the watch to the sergeant.

Carey showed signs of anxiety to be gone.

" If we knew where he has slept the last few days we'd find the key," he said. Then turning to me he added, " We'll want you at the inquest, merely to give evidence as to his condition when you saw him, of course."

Having ascertained when the inquest was likely to be held I slipped outside, and, the tide now being high and within a yard or two of the boat-house, plunged

my hand over the edge of the small jetty into the water. As the others emerged Carey noticed my position.

"Looking for the key?" he asked almost jocularly.

"Yes," I said, well aware of how fatuous the reply must sound.

However, it was not the watch-key I meant, but the key to the mystery which had begun to trouble me. As soon as the others left and the local constable was locking up the boat-house, McNab suggested a stroll along the bay.

Now when we turned our backs on that small, dark boat-house and faced the wide expanse of blue-green sea asleep in the warm sunshine, I ought to have been feeling relief. My responsibility was at an end. As Carey had said, it was well for everybody and not least for the man himself, that the affair had ended as it did. The danger was over, and no harm had come to any one. All the same I was disturbed in mind. Possibly disturbed is too strong a word. Irritated professionally—that would be closer to my feeling. And it probably was this feeling of vexation that made me, before we had walked far, only half-conscious of what I did, sit down on an upturned boat and pull out my pipe. then I perceived McNab's eyes on me.

"Something bothering you?" he suggested.

McNab's eyes were not, as I understand a sleuth's orbs ought to be—of the penetrating, steel-blue variety. There was, in fact, little about him to suggest the detective, and the impression I took of him when I first met him in his flat in the Adelphi remained unchanged. His clear-cut features, lively dark eyes, sensitive hands and lithe, upright figure, suggested the young doctor—the young doctor, with the bloom of youth behind him, who, at the end of prolonged hospital work, in which athletic interests were not forgotten, has just stepped out into his first private practice, and has therefore

become careful about his personal appearance. But though his eyes were not of the cold, knife-like sort, they could be keen enough. They were when he put his question.

" Well, I am bothered," I admitted. " Oh, quite a small thing, you know. That's what makes it irritating, perhaps."

" Anything to do with the body ? "

I hesitated.

" Well—yes, it's a question of certain contradictory peculiarities about that body ; but it's a highly technical matter."

" Oh, I wouldn't venture to express my own opinion," McNab cried with exaggered earnestness, as if he thought I had been heading him off from putting further questions. After a puff or two at his pipe he said, " Still, I might be able to follow. In my job one picks up a lot of miscellaneous knowledge, from toxicology to—to watch-making," he added as he saw me take out my watch. But as a matter of fact I was ready enough to talk.

" Did you notice the face ? " I asked, beginning with the simplest of the three abnormalities.

" I did. It was of an ashy whiteness."

" On the facts given it should not have been."

" Why not ? "

" Because the head being relatively heavier than the body, sinks lower in the water, with the result that the blood sinks too, and leaves the face livid."

" Invariably ? "

" No, there are exceptions. But the point is that the other two peculiarities can only be accounted for as also rare variations from what normally takes place. Now one exception, however rare, would not trouble me ; but when we get, as in this case, three together, I *am* troubled to explain them to myself."

After pondering this for a little McNab suggested that the same one cause might have operated in producing the three peculiarities. When I told him this was impossible he reminded me that impossible was a word that had now almost dropped out of a scientist's vocabulary. That provoked me.

" Very well," I said, " consider the peculiarity of the cadaveric rigidity ; how is that to be accounted for ? "

" But, Dunn, excuse me, I understood there was no rigidity anywhere."

" Exactly ; that is *the* peculiarity. *Rigor mortis* is a gradual process, extending from a few minutes after death up to about twenty hours before it is complete. Yet in this case after seven hours there was not a trace of it, not even in the eyelid muscles where it invariably begins, although the onset of rigidity is extremely rapid in water."

" But to this there are known exceptions ? "

"Yes; there have been rare cases of rigidity delayed up to three days. Yet the last peculiarity is the strangest."

" Go on," McNab urged, suddenly impatient as I paused to think it over once more.

" It is this. You heard Colonel Carey ask Sullivant to give his opinion as to the time which had elapsed since death occurred ? And you saw that one of the tests Sullivant used was the body's temperature. He laid his hand on the body. That is not a good test, since the temperature of the hand itself varies in different people, and what seems very cold to a warm hand will feel less cold to a cold hand. Sullivant knew this as well as any one, but he had probably broken his thermometer, or left it behind and did not want to say so. But here again it did not seem to matter much, since they had the evidence of the two men who last saw him alive about 4 a.m. and, as it turned out, the approximate time of death was shown by his watch to be 4.16.

"Now, notice this. A body loses its heat gradually, beginning, of course, with the surface, till it falls to the temperature of its surroundings, where it stays. Now, though the test of touch made by Sullivant is not good, by the same test I myself, having taken more care than he did, can tell you that de Quettville's body was several degrees *colder* than the sea out of which it had just been taken. And yet I do not consider that in normal circumstances seven hours' immersion is long enough to get a body down as *low* as the temperature of the sea."

McNab stopped me.

"A moment," he said. "Do I understand you to say that the body was colder than the water out of which it had been taken?"

"Yes. Of course the temperature of the sea is high at this season, higher here than in England, and in the dark boat-house the temperature of the body would fall almost rapidly."

"Beginning with the surface skin?" he interjected.

"Yes."

McNab's face, I noticed, fell at this admission.

"Oh, well, that would account for it," he remarked as he relit his pipe.

"Not conclusively, yet here again one cannot be positive; the conditions did favour rapid cooling, yet not so quickly in so short a time. But let that abnormality also pass; there still remains the strangest feature of all."

"And that is?"

"You said that some one cause might have operated to produce all the three exceptional features.'

"I suggested it."

"Well, it was not a good suggestion, as I believe, now that we have set out the facts, any layman can recognise. To put it quite simply: cadaveric rigidity and decrease in temperature are two processes which

go on together. As the body cools the muscles stiffen. Yet in this case the body is cold while the muscles remain pliable. It is incredible that any one cause could operate to produce such *opposite* results. In fact, if there is any one circumstance which can produce such opposite effects recorded in post-mortem manuals it is unknown to me."

He looked up through narrowed eyes.

"You mean, of course, a body dead for no more than seven hours?"

"I do."

Having thus got all I had to say off my mind I set a match to my own pipe, and let McNab make what he could out of the facts. We had the beach to ourselves. everything was motionless; even the sea itself seemed asleep in the noonday sunshine. In that translucent air objects at a great distance took on a sharpness in detail and outline which gave one the illusion of an increase in one's power of vision. Away out in the bay, among the small rocky islets, the silence was broken by a sudden clamour of sea birds, excited apparently by the discovery of some wandering shoal of small fry.

But McNab had withdrawn to a world of his own. He had drawn his legs up almost chin high and maintained them in position by encircling them with his arms. His pipe had gone out again, and its position in his mouth seemed as precarious as his own position on the side of the boat, while his hat, thrust to the back of his head, seemed as likely to drop back over the other side. His furrowed brow and lidded eyes, as well as his abandoned attitude, told of troubled thought.

As for me, I had had enough of thought. I let him get on with it, and squatting on the sand leant my head back against the boat till sleep overtook me—sleep of which I had not had anything like enough.

CHAPTER XIII

A CLUE OUT OF SEQUENCE

"DUNN," McNab began, "is there anything known to medical science which would account for it?"

The question was the one I had been expecting. But it had been a long time coming. After I awoke and found McNab still perched on the boat and quite as oblivious of his surroundings as I had just been, I dragged him off to the little hotel on the cliffs at Pleinmont for lunch. Not till lunch was over did the heavy drowsiness induced by my sleep in the hot sun leave me. And not till then did McNab make one reference to the matter which preoccupied our thoughts. That is why I was well aware of what his question meant.

"You are referring to the contradictory post-mortem appearances?"

"Yes. Is such a condition unknown?"

At that I let the fact appear, the fact that had bothered me so much.

"Not at all in a body dead for about three days."

He glanced up, startled.

"Three days! As long as that?"

"Not an hour less, especially in cases of death from asphyxia. Any time after three days, however, the rigidity passes off while the coldness, of course, remains."

He nodded slowly, abstractedly stirring the coffee I had ordered as an extra stimulant to thought.

"Yes, so I understood, but you see what it means?"

"Of course; that's what I've seen all along."

"But he died by drowning."

"Certainly. Sullivant will be right in signing for asphyxia. But believe me, that body has not been three days in the sea."

"Eh?"

"It has not been three days in the sea," I repeated.

"Why are you so sure?" he demanded.

"Because when I made my examination its temperature was so much lower than that of the water. It could only have been in the sea for a relatively short time before it was found, too short a time for the sea to *raise* it to anything like its own temperature."

McNab leant across the table, his eyes ablaze.

"If that is so we can take it then that this Daniel Sarchet and the other man, who say they saw de Quettville walking towards the sea about four this morning, are either lying now or were mistaken then?"

This was only part of the problem, as I reminded him.

"But what about Mrs. Bichard, and the girl, Alice Mauger? They also saw him yesterday morning. And if it comes to that, I saw him myself before the two men, yet just at a time which tends to confirm their story."

"No," McNab interrupted. "we must at any rate leave you out. To be exact, what you saw was a leg merely, and that may have been anybody's."

On this, however, I had to correct him. For though it was true that through Le Marinel's blunder in throwing the light on me I had not actually seen de Quettville, yet the leg I had seen was certainly clothed in the same pattern cloth as I had seen on the body in the boat-house. To this he assented without seeming to attach much importance to it at the moment.

"If you are right in saying he had been dead for at least three days, then neither Daniel Sarchet nor his friend, neither Mrs. Bichard nor Alice Mauger, saw him. As for yourself, you cannot have it both ways. You

must make your choice. You must be either, like them, mistaken in supposing you were at grips with him in the dark, or you are wrong in asserting that that body has been dead for three days."

It was not hard to make my choice.

"That body has been dead three days at the very least," I declared. "Not all the eye-witnesses in the world would make me believe that that body has been capable of voluntary movement since Saturday morning."

"All right, Dunn. As a matter of fact, I agree with you—for reasons of my own. But you see what it means? It means that if he has been dead since Saturday morning it was not he who threw the knife at you on Saturday night."

McNab was right. But so far the fact had not occurred to me. I had been so obsessed with the discrepancies between Sarchet's statement which tallied so well with my own assumption that I had actually had my hands on the man and the post-mortem appearances, that I had not yet thought back as far as Saturday. But McNab was right. For a moment we stared at each other.

"It's somebody masquerading as de Quettville," he said.

In ordinary circumstances such a conclusion would have seemed far-fetched, even absurd; but on the balance of probabilities it won easily, as McNab made me recognise.

"When one is faced, as we are now, with a straight choice between the incredible and the improbable," he remarked, "one naturally believes that the truth will be found somewhere in the improbable. Later it may turn out that the incredible was only apparently incredible, just as later the improbable may turn out to be only apparently improbable; but it is to the im-

probable one first goes for the truth. And after all," he went on, " when you think of it, it was not so difficult for the man to masquerade as de Quettville in the manner he did. No one spoke to him in the character ; no one even saw him except at some distance, and in no very good light either."

" But," I insisted, " for what purpose did he do it ? Robbery ? Was he simply taking advantage of the fact that de Quettville was known to be absent ? "

McNab's fist came down on the table.

" No ; he knew where the body was ! He put it back into the sea this morning, if all you have said about that body is right. And he also——" He broke off suddenly and pushing away his yet untouched coffee got to his feet. " Look here," he said. " this is a horrible affair, it makes me sick to think of it ; let's get outside to the fresh air and sunshine."

After settling the bill I found him seated on a bench, absent mindedly over-stuffing his pipe from an old rubber pouch with his eyes looking seaward. Magnificent, however, as was the prospect from that terrace, I doubt if he took in much of the great sweeping contour of the bay, or the vivid colouring among the tumbled cliffs behind. Nor did my own taste at the moment incline towards scenery. The number of possibilities now opened out in connection with the case seemed endless, and to guess where any one of those possibilities would lead was beyond me.

McNab, I gathered, did not believe de Quettville had died by his own hand. But his belief seemed to be held on other grounds than those which had weighed with me. Accidental death ? The body left above high-water mark where it was found by some one who concealed it for some end of his own ? To me this seemed just a possible explanation. But quite clearly McNab, reading more from the known facts than I, had already dismissed

the theory of accidental death. And at this point I saw that all I had said about the abnormal appearances of the body must have merely served to confirm a suspicion already existing in his mind when he began to put his questions to me after we left the boat-house. He had himself seen something more than met my eye. Suddenly I recollected the incident with Carey and the dead man's watch, and McNab's inquiry for the key. But how the absence of the key could have aroused suspicion I could not guess. McNab's voice recalled me to externals.

" You look mighty worried," he said, " standing there as if sudden bad news had turned you into stone. Maybe you're no' aware," he added, " that you've been glowering at me for the last ten minutes with your empty pipe in one hand, and your match box in the other."

This was a tone familiar to me ; but I had not heard it since his arrival till now. All the same, in spite of this chaff, I observed that his own pipe had just been set going.

" I can make neither head nor tail of it," I said, sitting down and regarding him with some hope. He laid his hand reassuringly on my knee.

" Laddie, it's simple, though. We've only picked up a clue out of its right order and position, that's all. What we need is an earlier clue, one nearer the start of the business, before we can understand this day's work."

" It's exactly like beginning a serial story in the middle," I asserted.

" Aye," he agreed, " that's what it is ; we've come in right in the middle of the story. A very interesting story, I'm thinking, though maybe not exactly edifying. But wait a bit, we'll get our hands on the—well, the synopsis before long."

" Before the next instalment is due ? "

McNab stirred uneasily.

" That I can't say," he hesitated. " There's just one man who might help us to a quick answer."

" The man who threw the knife ? "

" I was thinking of this lawyer, Le Marinel. A talk with him is the first step, if a talk with me can be contrived naturally."

After some discussion as to how the talk could be arranged it was agreed that Le Marinel should be asked to come up to see me that night, if in the meantime he did not, as was quite likely, communicate with me over the matter of the inquest on de Quettville. When this was fixed up McNab knocked the ashes from his pipe.

" What about a swim now ? " he suggested.

It was a suggestion I took with alacrity, as if it were the one thing I wanted but had not happened to think of. In a few minutes we had left the road and were on a grassy path that took us deviously among the huge, tumbled masses of rock lying like fallen giants about the base of the headland. Ultimately in a lonely cove, the access to which was sufficiently laborious to ensure us of undisturbed possession, we stripped. Before I was ready, however, McNab called to me.

" Have you got your thermometer ? "

" My thermometer ? "

I remembered how in my school days the temperature was always taken by the careful matron before we were allowed to bathe, and for an instant the absurd notion flashed through my mind that McNab wanted the temperature taken before he took the plunge. He put his head round his rock, his shirt arrested on its way over his head.

" Yes," he said, " your thermometer. Or have you left it behind like your colleague, or broken it ? "

Now the fact was that in my pocket-case I had both

a clinical and a bath thermometer ; but it wasn't going to be easy to use the low register instrument there. I looked down at the water, which was easy to reach by a dive, but though the rocks were smoothed by the tides of ages it made an awkward climb down, even if one carried the thermometer in one's mouth.

" I must be certain about it," he said.

I understood. He had seen me outside the boat-house putting my hand in the water. And it was quite true that the temperature of the water coming in on the flood over the hot sand would be considerably raised in the process ; but for all that, as also for other modifying factors, I had allowed an ample margin. Indeed, after I entered the water, and McNab followed hard on my heels, it did not take long to prove to his satisfaction that the margin of difference I had allowed for the shallower water at the jetty was more than adequate. Out in the deeper sea, where I submerged the thermometer, I let him have the first glance at the reading. Rubbing the water from his eyes he examined it carefully. The mercury indicated 64.3° F., which meant that my previous estimate had erred on the safe side by several degrees.

After a long swim from which we both emerged panting and blowing, we climbed to a high niche among the rocks, and lay down to get dried by the sun. The smooth rocks were full of a soft heat garnered from the many hours of sunshine, and up at that height a little drift of warm air, finding us out, played intermittently over our prone bodies, touching the skin into little delicate spasms of alternate coolness and warmth. It was too good a moment to waste in speech. We lay for a long time without a word, almost, on my own part, without thought. But when McNab rose silently, and after padding down to where we had left our clothes, returned with his tobacco pouch, a box of matches

and his little book of cigarette papers, I recognised he had thought of the one thing that could better that halcyon moment.

Deft as his fingers were I watched impatiently. He had a foible for rolling his own cigarettes. Like myself he was more given to a pipe, but he instinctively knew that at that perfect moment a pipe would have been wrong, almost indecent. Lying propped on my elbows I watched him as I smoked, himself now seated tailor-wise, finishing off his own cigarette.

There was a question I frequently wanted to ask him. For long I had wanted to ask him how he came to take up work as a detective and private inquiry agent. Some obscure form of delicacy restrained me, however; for such a question might imply either that I considered him too good for his job, or too bad at it. But something made this occasion propitious, and the question blurted itself out, almost pleadingly, so great was my curiosity.

"McNab, do you mind telling me how you came to be a private detective?"

In the act of putting the edge of the paper to his mouth, he looked at me, amusement in his eye.

"Och, no, I don't mind telling you that," he said. "It was because my father married a little scrap of a woman belonging to Callander."

"What?"

At first I thought he had misunderstood my question.

"In other words, I am a private detective because not having the necessary height or weight I cannot be a 'public' one." He sighed as he struck a match. "If only she had just passed on her wits to me, and left him to supply the physique! But she was like that, you understand—one of those women who think a thing never well done unless they do all of it themselves. Not, mind you, that my father hadn't brains too. He

must have had, since he rose to be a chief superintendent of police in Perthshire, which is the most law-abiding county in the whole of law-abiding Scotland."

"Well," I said clumsily, "no doubt there's scope in this country for both the professional and the amat—and the unofficial detective."

But my correction came too late. McNab nodded at me.

"An amateur is one who does for love what a professional does for money. Now I get quite a lot of money out of it, as you will probably believe later on. In fact, if a Scotland Yard man gets as much joy out of his job as I get money, we can cry quits in the matter of names. Besides that," he added, "if I were in an official position it would be impossible for me to do my *Record* newspaper articles on crime, or to pick and choose among the cases offered me."

But that was an end to our badinage for that day, for he began to put me through it pretty thoroughly in regard to the present case, and all the people who might be even remotely connected with it. He, however, would not commit himself to anything in replying to my questions, and that is why he got far the largest share of the many cigarettes he had to roll while listening to my replies. One glimpse, however, he did give me into the line he proposed to take first in his investigating. When we climbed down to the corner where we had undressed, his first act was to jot down in his note-book certain facts I had supplied. At least that is what I believe he did, for as I glanced over his shoulder while busy with my collar, I observed he was using some kind of shorthand of his own. But one entry proved intelligible, and this he asked me to verify:

Average temperature of a living body	..	98.4° F.
Actual temperature of the sea that day	..	64.3° F.

Estimated temperature of body recovered from sea .. .. 45° F.
Average rate at which heat is lost after death in the first three hours (*slower after that*) .. 3.5° F.

" You accept these figures ? " he asked.

" Yes, they will do."

" All right, see what we extract from them." He began to write with great rapidity When he had finished he handed me the book to read while he was dressing.

1. The body could not have been in the sea for seven hours only.

Because it takes about twenty-four hours to reduce the temperature of a body to the level of its surrounding medium.

But :

2. The body when found had a lower temperature than its surrounding medium.

Therefore :

3. The body has been lying since death in some place the temperature of which was several degrees lower than the sea.

Further :

4. The fact that cadaveric rigidity had passed off by the time the body was recovered from the sea supports this conclusion

And :

5. Indicates that death must have occurred *not less* than three days earlier.

" How does it strike you ? " he inquired, eyeing me keenly while busy with his collar.

There might be more in this than met my eye, but one thing I saw :

"This incriminates nobody," I said. "de Quettville may have first been drowned, either by accident or his own act; then his body might have been washed ashore, left among the rocks for three days or so till carried out once more, and then in again by the higher tide of this morning. There is no evidence that any human hand ever touched the body."

McNab's face relaxed as he began to pull up his tie.

"And suppose you offer this evidence at the inquest to-morrow you can anticipate the verdict?" he asked.

"They probably won't ask me for any of this—that side is Sullivant's affair. What they will ask me about is de Quettville's mental condition when I saw him last Thursday night, on the eve of his disappearance. But I can tell you what the verdict will be on this evidence: Found drowned, with nothing to show how the deceased came to be in the water."

He stared hard for a moment or two at me, hesitated, and then said:

"Of course, there is the evidence of his watch for the exact time at which he was drowned."

"Yes, Carey will no doubt mention that, and at the same time produce the watch," I said.

Again McNab stared at me so hard that I wondered if he had not something on his mind he wished to ask me.

"Look here," he said at length, "it seems to me the verdict may be suicide. This housekeeper—what's her name——?"

"Mrs. Bichard."

"Yes. Well, she will say that in consequence of his odd behaviour all that Thursday, his talking to people who were not there and all that, she became alarmed, and sent for a doctor. This will be corroborated by the parlourmaid and Miss Blampied?"

"Yes."

"And the lawyer, Le Marinel, can also testify to recent eccentricities?"

"No doubt."

"And the opinion you formed will substantiate all this, as well as Dr. Sullivant's opinion when he was placed in possession of the facts?"

"Yes, we agreed as to the man's insanity; our only difference was as to the acts to which his condition might lead."

"Dr. Sullivant suggested suicide; don't you think the verdict will be with him?"

"Not if it can be avoided. Even in England they are unwilling to return a verdict of suicide, and on a small island like this they probably will be still more anxious to avoid the stigma of suicide. You'll see, they'll give an open verdict of 'Found Drowned,' glad to find there is no direct evidence for any other."

"No direct evidence?"

"No; it's scarcely even presumptive evidence, since an insane person wandering about is no more immune from accident than any other; he may fall over the cliffs into the sea and be drowned like any one else."

McNab took over his note-book.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "it looks all very simple."

"Yet we know it is nothing of the sort," I said.

He nodded assent.

"Quite. The trouble, of course, is that we have got hold of a clue entirely unintelligible till we light on an earlier one which will explain it."

He spoke so confidently that I asked him what his next step towards obtaining this essential clue was to be. I gathered that he hoped for some light in the talk with Le Marinel I was to arrange for that night. Meanwhile, he wanted me to take him back to Perigord and introduce him to the housekeeper, so that

he might have the run of the place for the remainder of the afternoon. This suited me well enough so long as I did not myself have to stay on, for there were two or three patients I already had on my conscience, and on whom I must look in sometime that day.

On the way to Perigord we fixed things up. He could have a look round the house and grounds, see Mrs. Bichard and the maid, Daniel Sarchet, Mère Trouteaud and her Neptune, and catch the six o'clock bus from Pleinmont back to town.

When we had scrambled clear of the rocks McNab asked me how I proposed to explain him to Mrs. Bichard so that he might get the run of the place. It clearly would not at all suit his ends to say he was there because an attack had been made on me. And just as little would the old housekeeper understand any one seeking to probe about in order to obtain material for an attractive contribution to the *Daily Record*. Indeed, it became self-evident that, as far as possible, McNab's real business must be concealed, especially with the case in its then undeveloped state, lest essential evidence should, in the meantime, be destroyed by any one who had something to conceal. Finally, we arranged that I should present McNab as a surveyor, a designation vague enough to impress the simple old housekeeper, and sufficiently elastic to cover the closest inspection of the Perigord property, inside and out.

How vividly I recall that walk towards St. Pierre du Bois, under trees whose exuberant foliage formed a green shade through which the afternoon sun laid a network of golden tracery on the road. The very air seemed asleep. From the chimney of a little white farmhouse that stood gable end to the road, a thin spiral of blue smoke drifted and wound its way upward with an appearance of infinite languor. A little fawn and white Guernsey cow, slowly rubbing her neck on a

low gate, stopped the operation to regard us with placid, kindly eyes as we passed.

As we approached Perigord I wondered whether we should find Le Marinel there, and others perhaps who might make it difficult for McNab to get on with his investigations. The simple-minded country folk would present no obstacles. Indeed, they would accept him on what might be called his face value, and once they grasped his object, a rather lengthy process since they first thought in their Guernsey French and then spoke in English, he would be left undisturbed. But if others were about the house, Mrs. Blampied, say, keeping an eagle eye on her daughter's interests, it would he hard for him to hide his real object.

Luck, however, favoured us at the start. From Mrs. Bichard, red-eyed and shaken, we learned that Mr. Le Marinel had left only half an hour earlier, and that not only had Mrs. Blampied been there too but Mr. Brisson, in his daughter's interests, and Mr. George Drury as well. All the local arrangements had been left in the hands of Mr. Drury, she told us, since he lived in the neighbourhood, and being on the telephone could communicate with Mr. Le Marinel direct. McNab's intervention she appeared to accept as just one more among the many unusual and upsetting things such a tragic event thrusts on an ordered household.

When I left McNab was well on the way in his conquest of Mrs. Bichard. He was like that; he inspired confidence. I knew his methods for I had myself been under his treatment.

All the same, I hurried away convinced that if he unearthed there the clue he wanted it would lead him to the other Perigord, where Cæsar Brisson had much good wine in his big vaults alongside the quay.

CHAPTER XIV

SURPRISE FOR AN AVOCAT

LE MARINEL rang me up just after eight that Tuesday night. At first I thought the call might be from McNab, since he had not yet returned from Perigord. But when the avocat's voice came through telling me he wanted a talk over a rather private matter I was at no loss for a reply. It was better that Le Marinel should want to come to see me than that, as arranged with McNab, I should call him in to see us. But McNab had given me no indication of what the nature of his proposed talk with the avocat was to be ; and in any case McNab was not there. So I answered that I was free and that he could come over at once. My thought was that I could probably keep the lawyer in talk till McNab turned up. And while I waited my mind turned to resume its speculations on de Quettville's death. The one fact, about which all the thought I had given subsequent to seeing the body made me convinced, was that he had been dead for days. Beyond that I remained in a fog.

To make the inference that whoever had been impersonating the dead man at Perigord must have been some one who knew him well did not carry me far, since on a relatively small island people were very familiar to each other. But whether this masquerader were also a murderer, and what his motive could be, these were questions to which I had no answer. On the body there were no indications of any external violence. And if an autopsy had been arranged Carey had not called for my presence. He would, of course, ask Dr.

Sullivant, if anybody, to make the post-mortem examination, not only because he was his usual aide but also, I suspected, because Sullivant appeared to be right in his prediction of suicide, while my strongly expressed opinion that de Quettville had become a homicidal maniac was now demonstrably wrong. It need not be said that I felt thoroughly unhappy and uncomfortable about the whole case, not least on account of Dr. Wright whose *locum* I was. Both Carey and Le Marinel appeared to think I ought to have seen the man's mental condition when I first saw him on the Thursday night. And it was only the discovery of the nocturnal masquerader supposed to be de Quettville, which had seemed to prove my opinion right as against Sullivant's, that had for the moment re-established my professional reputation and won me their respect.

Well, my latest opinion that the man had been not less than three days dead would certainly not do anything except justify Sullivant, since instead of wandering about inflamed with a desire to kill some one, as I had suggested, it would make it seem that he had risen from his bed to throw himself into the sea!

I have said the one fact of which I was certain was that de Quettville had been dead for not less than three days. This is wrong. There was another fact following from it on which I was necessarily equally sure: the man who had been taken for de Quettville by four people who would no doubt testify at the inquest to having seen him, was certainly not de Quettville. But who was he? And what game was he up to? Then just as the door bell rang the thought came that McNab, out at Perigord, must be making progress towards an answer to both questions, since he was now a good two hours overdue.

Le Marinel seemed tired. He dropped rather heavily into a chair. I guessed that only some urgent matter would have brought him to see me that evening.

" Inquest is fixed for to-morrow at noon," he said.

" I know ; the notice was waiting for me when I got back."

He waved a weary hand.

" Yes, I fancied Carey would want your evidence. That's why I'd like to know what your evidence is going to be."

" In advance ? "

" Why, yes, if you don't mind."

" It will, of course, depend on the nature of the questions put to me."

He sat forward abruptly.

" I can tell you that. The questions will relate to the condition in which you found him when you visited him professionally last Thursday."

" Well," I said, " you know that both Sullivant and myself concluded him to be of unsound mind."

Le Marinel waved a hand, more alertly now.

" Sullivant will not be asked as to his mental condition. Sullivant did not see him alive. You alone saw him alive as late as Thursday night, just before he disappeared.

" Very well. I shall state that I formed the opinion that de Quettville suffered from delusional dementia."

" And that the opinion was formed on Thursday night ? "

" No ; that would be untrue. The opinion was not formed till after he had disappeared and we heard of his strange behaviour from the housekeeper and Miss Blampied when we went to Perigord on Friday night."

" Exactly." Le Marinel nodded. " And if I remember correctly the opinion you expressed to me on the Friday morning when we met outside my house in the Rue Galette was merely that you had found de Quettville a taciturn and bad-tempered patient. You were, in

fact, rather indignant at having been asked to go out and see him at all."

Pressed in this fashion I could only admit the correctness of the lawyer's memory. It was true that at the time de Quettville was seen by me no suspicion of his sanity had crossed my mind. As I made the admission a gleam of—no, perhaps not triumph but—satisfaction came into Le Marinel's eyes, and that satisfaction was also manifest in the way he softly rubbed the palms of his hands on his knees.

"Look here," I blurted out, "what is all this for?"

"Oh," he said, "all this is rather important in view of to-morrow's inquest. You see," he went on as he lifted one of his hands to examine a finger nail, "it might be awkward if you were to state that on seeing him you detected no traces of an unsound mind and then had to add that—well, that Mrs. Bichard got you to change your opinion about her master's sanity. That would not look well, *mon ami*—to be so influenced by an old woman's gossip, eh?"

Did he intend to be offensive? I stared at him in wonder and his eyes rose to meet my own.

"My concern is for your reputation, Dunn," he said with some eagerness. "Consider that, after all, you judged the man's mental condition not by what you yourself saw but by what the old woman said. Therefore, though to-morrow before the court you may say de Quettville was insane, the real and only authority for that declaration will be that imbecile old Mrs. Bichard speaking through your voice."

"Do you suggest that what she told me was untrue?" I demanded hotly.

"About hearing him talk to himself? No, an old man often does; many also who are not old, particularly in moments of agitation. About shutting himself up in this room? No; it was natural if he was afraid of some

one. And let me tell you de Quettville was in great fear. This is why he fled from his own house. That, indeed, is why he only ventured back at night."

Now the logic of all this would have hit me with shattering force but for the fact that I knew de Quettville had *not* been coming back at night. For I knew what Le Marinel did not know ; and that was that de Quettville had been dead probably from the night of his disappearance, certainly from the night after he disappeared. And had Le Marinel not irritated me quite so much I probably would have then and there acquainted him with the fact. As it was I kept it up my sleeve, intending to flatten him with it afterwards, when I discovered what the real object of his visit might be. For I did not believe that he was there solely, or even chiefly, out of concern for my professional reputation. Yet I saw it was quite possible de Quettville had gone in fear of some one, and indeed that such a fear might even be the cause of his mental collapse. Had the avocat somehow discovered the identity of this person ? If so this might be the earlier clue we needed, the absence of which left us feeling much as if we had begun a serial story half-way through.

" Well," I said deliberately, as if I had been considering his words all the time, " I see no evidence that de Quettville went in fear of anybody."

" Don't you ? "

" No."

Le Marinel laughed.

" Why, it's plain enough, it's written over all his actions ; it's the one fact that can explain both why he shut himself up and why he ran away."

" He ran away to drown himself, you think ? "

The lawyer writhed with impatience over my suggestion that he could think anything so stupid.

" No, no, no ! " he cried. " Why in heaven's

name should he take his own life? Whoever he feared could do no more to him than kill him. Why should he do it for them? No, what really happened must have been that after reaching the Pleinmont cliffs for which Sarchet and Nicolle saw him running, he *fell into the sea* and was drowned. There is no more need to presume suicide than there is need to suggest insanity."

Well, of course, I knew Le Marinel wanted to stop me from suggesting at the inquest that de Quettville was insane. I would have been as dense as he supposed me if I had not seen that from the first. But what I did not yet see was his object in trying to prevent such evidence being given. I might have put a straight question to him about that, but the truth is I had become sensitive to the fact that our relations with each other had altered in some subtle way. Frankness was at a discount that night. He had come to influence my evidence while I, on my side, annoyed by seeing him suppose I was blind to his purpose, had kept my own secret and let him talk as if I believed de Quettville had been drowned that morning. Still, if we were fencing with each other it was by his choice, not mine; and after all it served to keep him there against McNab's return.

"Of course," I said, "if one could be certain his actions were dictated by fear it might well alter one's opinion as to his mental condition, especially if one had proof of the identity of the person who terrorised him into such strange actions."

Le Marinel promptly replied in a way that revealed a taste for the dramatic. He leant forward, touched my knee with his forefinger and then pointing at me, whispered one word:

"Brisson!"

If he expected to startle me he was disappointed. Brisson was my own suspect, Brisson—aided by the good Catulle, of course.

"And the proof?" I inquired.

He spread out his hands in quite the French fashion, elevating his dark eyebrows.

"Oh, my friend, just consider. The hatred between the two is notorious for years. And the climax came when Brisson somehow got wind of de Quettville's intention to mortgage Perigord and so do his daughter out. Why, if de Quettville had been murdered instead of drowned I, who know much of the relations existing between the two men, would not hesitate to suspect Cæsar Brisson of the deed."

I had not hesitated myself to hold that suspicion; but I did not tell Le Marinel so. It impressed me, however, to find that he could share such a suspicion; and seeing this he tapped my knee and continued.

"You will remember what I told you while we watched last night. I have no doubt now that the will I told you of was drawn up in the hole and-corner manner, and kept a secret even from me, because he had developed a fear of his brother-in-law. That will he could keep secret, since the two witnesses were witnesses of his signature only, not of its contents. But the mortgage he could not keep secret if the holder of the mortgage talked, and that he must have done, or one of his clerks. Now you see what will happen if to-morrow Hilaire de Quettville is declared to have died by his own hand. The question of his sanity will arise, and if he is declared insane then the will is void, and then that nimble rascal Cæsar Brisson steps into everything."

In his indignation Le Marinel rose to pace the floor. Presently he stopped, turned to face me and as he paused I heard the door bell ring. But Le Marinel was too preoccupied to hear anything. He did not even hear the quite audible knock that next followed on the door behind him.

"Dunn," he cried with great solemnity, "there is but

one thing that can prevent Cæsar Brisson from stepping into the dead man's shoes: the verdict to-morrow must be Death by Misadventure."

The concluding words at least were overheard by McNab as he was shown in.

"Not by misadventure," he said, his hand still on the door.

Le Marinel wheeled round as if suddenly stung.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered, taken aback and nonplussed.

"By violence, not misadventure," McNab repeated quietly.

For a minute the two men stood staring at each other. Then McNab, looking past the other, caught my eyes and nodded.

"Ring up the Chief Constable. Ask him to come at once. Say the matter is urgent."

CHAPTER XV

SHOCKS FOR A CHIEF CONSTABLE

In my haste to get at the telephone I omitted to make the two men known to each other. This placed Le Marinel at a disadvantage, for while McNab from my talk about the avocat could easily divine his identity, he himself must have been a complete puzzle to Le Marinel. But by the time I got back McNab appeared to have explained himself to the other. Later I gathered that while I had been holding the line while Sergeant Torode was trying to pick up the Chief at one or other of his haunts, Le Marinel had, in his lawyer-like way, hinted his doubt about McNab's legal standing in the affair. But McNab had brushed this aside by the blunt state-

ment that, professional negligence having been suggested against me in regard to de Quettville, he himself was acting in my defence. To this Le Marinel could say nothing, since he had made the suggestion himself when I met him on the Saturday night just before I went to the wine shop. And, of course, McNab knew as well as the lawyer that this charge of professional incapacity, or negligence, might be revived at the inquest to-morrow.

To my relief the interval during which I had been out of the room appeared to have been occupied in settling this technical point about McNab's legal standing. But once I explained that Torode would get in touch with his Chief and send him up to us as soon as possible, Le Marinel proceeded to question McNab. He wanted to know how he could be so sure that de Quettville's death was due to violence and not to accident. Here, however, McNab turned the tables on the lawyer, coolly reminding him that this was a matter for the Chief Constable, with whom would rest the decision as to whether Le Marinel would at that stage in the case be told anything at all. After that the avocat sobered down. But he did not sit down. The sudden turn the case had taken on was, I suppose, too much even for his self-control. It certainly was so for my own, and I could well gauge his impatience for Carey's arrival by my own feelings. If McNab were right this meant murder. If McNab were right the murder must have been committed at least three days before the body was found. If McNab were right how had the murder been done so that no traces remained on the body? And in a body taken out of water it is known that even the smallest *ante mortem* bruise remains visible.

But McNab had not called it murder. He had simply said the death was due to violence. Had some one been attacked by the insane man and killed him in self-defence? In that event some mark of external violence

must have been visible. And yet I could swear to it that there was none.

Now Le Marinel as he hung about, hands deep in his pockets, a frown on his face, may have been preoccupied with thoughts along other lines; he may have been considering whether in a case of death by violence the question of insanity would arise, since it would be clear that de Quettville had not committed suicide. In which case the will would presumably stand valid. But if he was doubting the correctness of McNab's assertion that was a matter on which I knew more than he could know. McNab had all the proverbial caution of his race, perhaps a trifle more. And when I recalled his handling of the Kinloch affair in which I had found myself against him, and how I had actually laughed in derision when he told me exactly how he was going to find a blind man who did not, as I knew, then exist—! Well, he had been right about that. And I had no doubt that he was right now about de Quettville.

"Mr. Le Marinel."

"Yes?"

"Why did you have a new catch put on the study window?"

McNab's question broke the tension. Le Marinel revealed this by sitting down on the nearest chair.

"You mean at Perigord, I suppose. Well, it was because the old one was worn out, and the window frame so shrunken with age that the catch could easily have been pushed open by inserting a knife between the sashes. You see," he went on, expanding as if at the sound of his own voice, "I hadn't been long among the de Quettville papers before perceiving that there must be a good many people on the island who would be glad to get in among them. He had an astonishing amount of money out on loan, and on terms which made it plain why he kept his transactions to himself."

" You mean the terms were harsh ? "

Le Marinel nodded rapidly.

" Precisely. The interest so excessive that no *écrivain* in the island would have acted for him. So any one of his numerous clients might have held himself justified if he could force an entry in de Quettville's absence and destroy the evidence of his debt. That was a risk I couldn't take, when I saw that some of his debtors were —well, very tough customers."

" So you had this new catch fitted—yesterday ? "

Le Marinel stopped in the act of tapping a cigarette on the gold case.

" Ah, you got that from the housekeeper," he said.

" No, nobody told me ; it merely followed from something I noticed."

" Well, anyway, I could hardly have had the job done sooner, you know." He glanced at me. " We first saw the papers on the Friday night and as it was Saturday before I began to read them—well, there was no time."

" Had you any reason for suspecting that some one had entered the study ? "

" Yes. On the Sunday it seemed to me the papers were not as I had left them. But I had made no special note of their order and so could not be sure. When, however, the housekeeper reported seeing de Quettville in the garden, my idea was that he had entered by the study window, the one key of the study door being in my possession, and so, though he could enter the house by means of the side door key he himself had on his ring, he could not enter the study except by the window."

" But once in the study he could leave by the door ? "

" Yes, it is a latch lock."

" Any one entering by the window could snap the catch back, then leave by the door, pull that behind him and leave no evidence of his presence ? "

" Quite. That is what de Quettville did. But when the new catch was on the window I hoped to force him to enter by the side door. Colonel Carey knows all about that. That is how we hoped to take him last night. The new catch, unfortunately, does not seem to have been as strong as I believed."

Le Marinel, in a disappointed way, struck a match and held it to his cigarette. McNab waited till the operation was completed.

" Mr. Le Marinel," he said, " your new catch was very nearly strong enough. But if it had been ten times stronger you would not have taken de Quettville last night."

The avocat threw up his head.

" What—what's that you say ? " he cried.

" You could not have taken de Quettville simply because de Quettville was not there."

The avocat's face, with its dropped jaw and arched eyebrows, made an almost comic picture of utter bewilderment.

" Not there," he echoed. " But—but " he looked over at me—" but somebody was there, as Dunn knows."

" Oh, yes ; it was no shadow that knocked him out."

" Then who was it—who in heaven's name was it ? "

" That is what we want to find out, with your help," said McNab.

After a moment Le Marinel slowly shook his head.

" There are so many—twenty at least among those papers who might have——" He stopped abruptly as if one name had suggested itself as most likely. Then again he shook his head. " No, not Brisson," he murmured. " Brisson owed him no money, had nothing to gain by entering the study, so long as de Quettville was alive."

" And if he were dead at the time ? "

" But he wasn't."

" But suppose he was."

The lawyer's gesture indicated that he considered this childish. When McNab persisted, however, he replied:

" Brisson, in that case, would have everything to gain. He must have heard, like others, about the mortgage, and although he could not know whether it had yet been implemented, that did not matter, since he had only to get at the will and destroy it to secure not only the money raised by the mortgage but everything else as well."

For a second or two McNab looked keenly at the lawyer, then spoke.

" All right, Mr. Le Marinel ; he *was* dead when that man came to Perigord last night."

I fancy the avocat did not credit his ears ; either that or he thought McNab had gone crazy.

" Eh ? " he whispered blankly. " What did you say ? "

When McNab repeated the statement he looked at me for confirmation.

" He must have been dead for three days before he was taken from the sea," I said.

And slow as he had been to grasp the medical facts he was mighty quick to recognise the legal implication. I saw it in his eyes before my explanation ended. He leaped to his feet.

" By God ! " he cried, " that means that if *Cæsar Brisson* was the man who entered Perigord last night he already *knew* de Quettville to be dead."

McNab nodded his assent and approval.

" That seems to follow, since he would otherwise have nothing to gain by destroying the will if his brother-in-law were still alive."

Le Marinel straightened up to stare at McNab. We felt, I think, that a moment of crisis had arrived. All along, of course, my suspicion had centred on Brisson and his ally Coquard. But how much could McNab

prove? This question appeared to be in Le Marinel's mind also.

"And if he knew he was dead, how did he come to know? Had he made sure he was dead by——?"

McNab held up a protesting hand.

"That does not follow. He may have found him dead."

"But you suspect him," I asserted, for it did seem far-fetched to suggest that Brisson might, somewhere, have come upon the body of de Quettville, and then cut away to Perigord to hunt for his will. Yet my assertion had an effect on McNab as strange as it was unexpected. He turned on me.

"I'll tell you what I suspect," he said. "What I suspect is that you could tell us a great deal more about this case than you have done."

"Me?" I cried, utterly taken aback.

"Yes."

"I've told you absolutely everything."

This brought a vigorous negative.

"No! You told me what you saw and heard; but there was something you did not see or hear, something you *must* have missed, Dunn. It was thought you had *not* missed it, though. And that's why that hasty knife attack was made on you."

"You mean that?" I asked.

"Certainly; that sudden knife attack is not to be accounted for otherwise. And I'm sure Mr. Le Marinel will agree with me."

The avocat's pale face, however, reflected the uttermost surprise and bewilderment.

"Knife attack!" he repeated. "What knife attack? This is the first I have heard of such a thing."

On that I had to give Le Marinel the story, exactly as I had already reported it to the Chief Constable and McNab. At first my fancy was that Le Marinel resented

having been kept in the dark about this, for he appeared to think it was only through McNab's mistaken assumption that he must have known all about it that he was hearing about it now. But before I finished the frown disappeared, and when I frankly related the suspicions roused by my experiences in the wine shop I could see he was entirely with me there. For those suspicions, like his own, pointed straight at Brisson. Although I had laid no stress on the thieves' *argot* I had detected in the vocabulary of the good Catulle, Le Marinel fastened instantly on this feature. Its significance was not lost on the avocat in him ; and the fact that Coquard used the thieves' slang was accepted as convincing proof that Coquard belonged to the worst criminal class in Paris. We had it all our own way when it came to discussing *argot* French, and McNab had never a word to say. Indeed, we almost forgot he was there, lying back in his chair listening.

Le Marinel did not doubt the attack had come from Coquard, and could not understand why I had given up that belief.

" Well," I said, " I knew that the *apache* does not throw the knife. It would be a useful accomplishment in a city like Paris if he could. He likes his knife because it is quiet, but he never seems to have learnt the art of killing at a distance with it."

Let Marinel pondered this, fingering his chin.

" Yes," he said, " it is strange the trick isn't known where it would be so useful."

Then an explanation occurred to me. The *apache* is no traveller. Indeed, he seldom goes further afield than the outer boulevards. But occasionally he is made to travel, even as far as the French penal settlements. Still, though the art of knife-throwing has its home in these regions, I could hardly visualise the French authorities providing their prisoners with knives, much

less supplying them with native instructors in the art. So any degree of proficiency implied a sojourn, and a rather long sojourn too, among the natives, free from all official interference. Now the fact that the knife was thrown was equivalent to a proof that the man who threw it had lived for some time in the southern latitudes of the world. Le Marinel at once agreed when I put this to him.

"It would simply mean," he remarked, "that this Coquard is a transported criminal who escaped from Cayenne."

At this McNab woke up.

"But," he said, "isn't that begging the question? Aren't you assuming as true what has yet to be proved: that Coquard is the man who threw the knife?"

Le Marinel hesitated.

"I was merely assuming it for the moment," he said, "as a possibility. You yourself, I am sure, as a detective have often followed the method of elimination. And surely in this instance we can rule out as beyond suspicion all who have never lived for some considerable time in those regions where knife-throwing is practised. Now," he went on quickly as McNab stirred as if to speak, "all I say is that Coquard as a Paris *apache* might well have been sent to those regions, and if he is an escaped prisoner it would account not only for his ready use of the knife but for his taking refuge on this island with Brisson."

"But why attack Dunn? If you think it was because Coquard happens to be one of the men Dunn has told us about, one of the four he helped to arrest five years ago in Paris, then the attack on Dunn last Saturday has no connection with de Quettville's death."

Before replying the avocat glanced at me deprecatingly.

"Well, since you put it like that," he said, "I'm afraid I must agree with you that Dunn was attacked

because it was supposed he knew something which he, in fact, did not know. I think, further, that it was something he said, or saw, or overheard, in the wine shop that frightened Brisson, who promptly availed himself of the new talent his friend Coquard had acquired in a distant hemisphere."

This brought McNab forward in his chair.

"And now we can go back to the suggestion that Brisson may have *found* de Quettville dead, and concealed the body in, say, one of his empty wine casks till he had time to go through his papers. Does that theory sound tenable now?"

The question was put to the avocat.

"Absurd," he promptly replied. "Quite absurd, unless de Quettville had been murdered."

"Then the attack on Dunn would be accountable if they believed he knew something about the murder."

"Then, and then only," Le Marinel agreed.

Here the 'phone went off out in the hall. When I got my ear to it the voice of Sergeant Torode came through; they had run the Chief to earth out at the Vale and he was now on his way to us. Returning with the news I found McNab playing the host with my whisky. Indeed, Le Marinel was protesting against the stiffness of the peg McNab had poured into his glass.

"Remember," he was saying, "whisky here is one-third stronger than you are allowed to drink it in England."

McNab was greatly surprised.

"Do you tell me!" he cried, elevating the decanter to stare at the contents, "a third stronger?"

"And less than half the price," Le Marinel nodded. "Didn't you know?"

McNab shook his head as he lifted his own glass and winked at me.

" Not me ; and I doubt if the fact is generally known. I'm sure, at least, that not even a rumour of it has reached Scotland."

" Oh, I don't know," Le Marinel responded, " they do say there's a Scotsman or two on every boat that comes in."

" That's nothing, man. If what you tell me about the income tax, the whisky and the tobacco were generally known in Glasgow, nothing less than a direct boat-service from the Clyde would meet the need."

The sudden change in the atmosphere induced by all this jocularity was astonishing. We had all been on the strain, and, I suppose, were ready to relax for a moment or two on any pretext. Le Marinel seemed to have thawed. With a gleam in his eyes he nodded at McNab like a wagtail.

" You know," he said, " I believed at first you even suspected me of being the man who was masquerading in the dark as de Quettville."

McNab laughed.

" Why shouldn't I ? You were on the spot last night ; you wandered about the house alone, and for all Dunn here could see you might yourself have knocked him out with the chair."

Le Marinel laughed too.

" After throwing the light of my torch in his eyes to see just where he stood."

" Exactly. And we must not forget that, after all, no third person did enter by the door while Dunn watched it."

" Of course. *I* didn't need to ; I was there already ! That's where Carey and his sergeant were dished. No wonder you considered the possibility."

McNab waved a hand.

" I might have gone further than that but for one thing that cleared you," he said.

"What was that?" the avocat cried, greatly interested.

"The scented handkerchief."

"The what?"

"Oh, it was a small thing"—McNab smiled—"but it was none the worse evidence for that—all the better, in fact, since it was unlikely to be thought out beforehand."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Le Marinel said in round-eyed amazement.

"Just this. Dunn here in giving me the facts about his watch with you behind the door, happened to say that while struggling with the man, and before he was knocked senseless, he became very conscious of a perfume which pervaded the whole place. Well, now, that was quite reliable evidence that you were not the man. You don't see it? Well, consider the pervasive qualities of perfume. Had it been on your handkerchief, Dunn, with whom as I understand you sat side by side for hours, would have noticed it sooner. But as he only became conscious of it when he was grappling with the man, it indicates that a *third* person was then present."

How much further this might have gone I cannot say, but just then a sharp ring on the door bell brought the jesting to an end. At the sound of Colonel Carey's voice in the hall McNab turned to the avocat.

"Now," he said with seriousness, "we return to the new window catch you fitted to the window."

It seemed we had dragged the Chief away from a dinner party. But to judge by his pleasant and inclusive nod we had not spoilt his humour; and in any case he must by that hour have finished his dinner before the call reached him.

"It's about that attack on Dr. Dunn," McNab began.

" I wanted to show you something I found this afternoon below the study window at Perigord."

Producing his pocket-book McNab extracted from between its pages a silvery, pointed object about four inches long : the broken end of a double-edged knife.

" Unfortunately for us," he added, " the maker's name must have been placed near the handle."

Carey turned over the length of blade and nodded.

" You suggest this was the knife used against Dr. Dunn ? "

" I have reason to believe so," McNab replied ; " but we have not yet tried it in the hole in Dr. Dunn's door. The point was broken off in forcing the new catch put on the study window."

Carey glanced at me.

" If it does fit it confirms our guess that the attack came from de Quettville," he said. " Not that there was much doubt about that," he added. " Still, now I am here, we may as well test it."

In the tone more than the words there was an ever so gentle reproach which implied that we had called him from pleasant company to confirm something which needed no confirmation. In that respect Carey, I fancy, then considered the fractured blade as a parallel to the fragment of seaweed McNab found in the watch, and which he had exhibited as proof of what needed no proof : that the man whose body had just been taken out of the sea had been drowned in the sea.

McNab, however, now, as then, made no comment ; and at a gesture from him we followed Carey into the hall. The colonel himself, on his knees, fitted the blade into the hole. There could be no doubt about it ; this was the blade that had come at me on the previous Saturday night. We all tried it in turn, and found that it fitted perfectly, and firmly like a blade in its sheath. But the significance of this was to Carey nothing like

what it was to us. To him it merely meant that this undoubtedly was part of the knife de Quettville had in his insanity thrown at me, and de Quettville now being dead the incident was closed. To us, who knew that de Quettville had been dead before the knife was thrown, it meant—well, only McNab could tell us that!

Carey, after a minute or so, was about to take his leave when McNab stopped him.

"We know the knife was not thrown by de Quettville," he said.

Carey lifted his head, staring vaguely.

"What?" he said, in an effort at apprehension. "Not thrown by de Quettville. How can you know that?"

"Because he was dead at the time."

Then I believe a doubt of McNab's sanity did come to Carey. He peered at us standing behind McNab in the dusk of the hall.

"But de Quettville was drowned this morning," he stammered.

"Not this morning, sir. McNab said with confidence, "not less than three days ago."

"Who says so?" Carey demanded crisply, now master of himself.

"Dr. Dunn found demonstrative evidence of the fact in the condition of the body."

"Dr. Dunn, eh? Well, forgive me, but an assertion of this nature sounds—well, needs support. Dr. Sullivant saw the body, assigned the cause, and hour of death which the watch confirmed, and though doctors can, like the rest of us, make mistakes, Sullivant certainly made no mistake when he predicted suicide."

For all the hasty rush of words the thing could scarcely have been more delicately put. Carey had deftly drawn the contrast between Sullivant and myself,

calling attention to my previous mistakes, as he thought them to be, without mentioning them.

" But this does not rest on Dr. Dunn alone," McNab was saying.

" No ? Who then supports his view ? "

" I do. What Dr. Dunn as a medical man saw in the body's condition only served to confirm a conclusion I had previously reached," McNab declared.

The stiff formality of his tone impressed the Chief Constable.

" You yourself, independently of Dunn, saw something that convinced you he had been three days dead ? "

" More than that, sir," McNab replied. " I had not been ten minutes in the boat-house before I was sure the man had been murdered."

" Murdered ? "

It was almost a cry. His eyes went from face to face. Nobody spoke. Neither Le Marinel nor myself had anything to say. And McNab looked as if he had said his say. Then the Chief Constable pulled himself together, put up his hand and quietly shut the door.

CHAPTER XVI

CAREY CREATES A DEADLOCK

COLONEL CAREY was a changed man by the time we got back to the room. His eyes had lost the glint of humour usually there, and the hint of a smile usually about his mouth was no longer discernible. He pulled up short and wheeled round sharply.

" Le Marinel, you have heard the facts on which this suggestion of murder is based ? " he asked in a voice

that had an edge. Even his easy-fitting dress clothes had somehow taken on the rigidity of a uniform.

Le Marinel bowed.

"Some of them."

"Speaking now as an avocat, do you consider the suggestion of murder tenable?"

"Tenable, yes, certainly. But not yet proved," Le Marinel replied promptly.

On that Carey, with a gesture, sent us to our chairs. He was going to examine the evidence for himself. He nodded at McNab.

"State your case," he said in a grave, official tone new to me.

McNab's statement of the case included the facts already known to us, but he handled and marshalled them in a way that to me at least strengthened conviction. He began by showing that though de Quettville met his death by drowning, he had not been drowned that day. The discrepancies in the post-mortem symptoms were decisive against that, as they also were against the suggestion that the body had been in the sea for several days. What the physiological facts proved was that de Quettville had been dead for not less than three days, which was about the time when *rigor mortis* begins to disappear. But the body could not have been in the sea all that time since if it had its temperature would have been the same as that of the sea. Wherever the body had been in the interval between death and the time at which it had been transferred to the sea, that place must have been a place with a lower temperature than the sea, since the body when found was at a lower temperature than the sea. And this fact also proved that the body had not been in the sea long enough to be raised to the temperature of its surrounding medium. Thus, obviously, since a dead body cannot move itself, some one had put it into the sea a

few hours before it was found. Yes, there was evidence of contrivance and forethought in the time chosen for transference to the sea. It had been put there exactly at the time when cadaveric rigidity began to pass off, and thus the impression would be conveyed that the man had been drowned only a few hours earlier, since when found cadaveric rigidity, which normally lasted about three days, would apparently not yet have set in.

"Whereas you suggest it was really over?" Carey inquired.

"Exactly. And," McNab went on, "as the only way of harmonising the absence of rigidity with the low temperature is to conclude that death took place not less than three days earlier, it follows that it was not de Quettville who came to Perigord last night; nor was it he who was seen by the two fishermen making for the sea that morning. Again, you see, some one is offering us an appearance for the reality."

"And the reality?" Carey questioned as McNab stopped to pour himself out a drink.

"Looks like murder."

"Looks like! Appearances again?" Carey frowned.

McNab shifted impatiently.

"Is not the attack on Dunn enough to suggest it can be no less than murder? The man who made the attack risked his own life to do it. What his motive was we cannot yet tell; but that the attack had some connection with de Quettville's death is made certain by the discovery that the blade found under the window at Perigord fits the hole in the door of this house."

There was a long silence in which Carey stood holding his chin, eyes on the carpet, considering this argument. We all watched him. Finally, he looked up.

"No," he said, "there's nothing much in all this. Suppose I accept the medical evidence that the man has been dead three days, we can account for everything

if he was drowned three days ago, after which his body was left by the tide in some crevice or corner among the rocks till it floated out again this morning by the higher tide."

This was a possibility I had myself seen. And now it occurred to me that a body among the rocks and out of the sun might have a lower temperature than the sea.

McNab rose from his chair.

"My dear sir, your suggestion, pardon me, is simply preposterous," he said.

Carey obviously did not like this; he became rather pink about the gills. I imagine he had allowed more of the old Indian official to come into his manner and tone than he knew. He curbed himself now with apparent effort.

"There is no evidence whatever, that I can see, that any human hand touched the body," he declared.

"You are forgetting the man's watch," McNab said.

"The watch?" Carey lifted his eyebrows.

"Yes, the watch; its evidence is eloquent, and blows your tide theory sky high."

"I don't quite see that," the other man said calmly.

"No." McNab nodded. "You didn't see it this morning either."

Carey looked at us with a patient, fleeting smile as the memory came back.

"I remember you drew my attention to a piece of seaweed in the watch case."

"And what did that tell you? That de Quettville took out his watch to see at what time he was drowning himself? Do you believe that? I should have thought that at such a moment he would be less concerned with Time than with Eternity." McNab began to get a trifle excited. "Oh, that watch just fair shouts things at you. The hands of it had stopped at 4.16, a quarter of an hour or so after de Quettville was seen by the two fishermen

hurrying towards the shore. But if his body had been lying among the rocks for three days, as you suppose, it could not have been him they saw. But it is easy to see who he was—the man who opened the watch to set the hands at 4.16 in order to suggest that de Quettville had been drowned at that time that morning. There is the evidence that some human hands *had* touched the body that morning. No one else could have known in advance at what time to set the hands. But after he had been seen, this man, aware that a renewed search would follow, and *knowing where the body was*, went straight to it to get it into the water. At the last moment, with the body already among the seaweed, the thought came to him to alter the hands of the watch in order to confirm the tale he knew the two men would tell, and so establish the fiction that de Quettville met his death by drowning at that precise time."

Carey seemed, like ourselves, rather overwhelmed by McNab's rapid and vehement presentation of his evidence. His tone changed, and we recognised with relief that a breeze between the two men had been avoided.

"I suppose," he began diffidently, "it would be too miraculous a coincidence if the watch had just happened to stop at that exact time on the real day when he actually was drowned?"

McNab shook his head.

"Miraculous coincidences do happen," he admitted. "But you see, sir, in this instance the watch had been *opened*—opened to alter the hands. That was what first caught my eye in the boat-house. I thought it odd that de Quettville, who was then supposed to have drowned himself, should trouble to correct his watch. Then when Dunn spoke of the peculiarities and anomalies in the body's condition, it became self-evident that it was not de Quettville who had opened the watch at 4.16 that morning."

" Suppose it is murder, have you any idea who the murderer is ? "

" No evidence," McNab replied. " But where no evidence exists we usually begin by asking who profits by the death."

" Ah," Le Marinel cut in, " an ancient practice that, the principle of *cui bono* ; Roman law always applied it."

Carey turned to the avocat.

" All right, you apply it now."

The avocat sat forward, nothing loth, although he began guardedly.

" Supposing the evidence has established this as a murder, and speaking merely as an avocat whose duty it is to make out a case, the main relevant facts to which I would draw your attention are these : the bad feeling known to exist between the dead man and his brother-in-law, Cæsar Brisson ; the deepening of this feeling into hatred when it became known that de Quettville proposed to mortgage Perigord solely with a view to make it a worthless property when it passed to Brisson's daughter at his decease, and the fact that only de Quettville's immediate death before the deed of mortgage was executed could prevent this."

Carey nodded.

" Yes, I agree that Brisson had very strong motives. That is so apparent that anyone could see it."

McNab's brow puckered as he stared at Carey.

" Ah, you mean that any one having a grudge against de Quettville could count on that as cover for himself ? "

" I do," Carey assented. Any one with a grudge against de Quettville *or* Cæsar Brisson," he added significantly.

This startled us all. It gave the affair a new turn, opening out possibilities not before visible. It was Le Marinel who first recovered himself.

"That's all very well," he began, "but there are certain indications which point straight at Brisson."

"You didn't mention them just now," Carey said.

"No, I was dealing with motive. Yet though the things I have in mind might be called straws, they have their proverbial value as indications. For example, the murderous attack on Dunn, which from the knife blade we now know to have *some* connection with the nocturnal entry into Perigord, followed immediately on the visit he made to Brisson's wine shop. Again, I am convinced that there is some direct connection between de Quettville's death and the figure of Neptune set up over the gateway at Perigord. I think the story begins with the setting up of that figure, and my notion is that we shall never get at the truth about this affair till we know more about the Friday night on which that figure was erected on the gate. But what in the meantime is clear is that it was transformed into an effigy of a money-lender with the three golden balls to upset de Quettville. And it did upset him, making him take to his bed, and all that. Now the erection of the Neptune over the gate was held to be merely an act of mockery. But suppose there was a deeper calculation in it. Suppose it to be part of a scheme to worry and harass this man into exhibiting what could be taken for symptoms of insanity. Why then, in that event, not *only* would the Perigord property be saved if he died before the mortgage could be completed, but, if evidence of an unsound mind could be produced, the will by which he left his money elsewhere would become null and void, and Brisson's daughter would inherit all."

Here Carey protested that Le Marinel was recurring to motive and pleading his case like an avocat for the prosecution, whereas he had promised facts which pointed directly at Brisson. This was admitted by Le Marinel.

" But," he said, " I have given you one fact, and I was only leading up to the other. Do you agree that the affair probably began with the erection of the Neptune on the gate ? "

" That is what I have believed all along," Carey replied without hesitation.

" Very well. Now consider this rather delicate point. One of the pointing straws, I called it, and as it involves a point in psychology a mere matter-of-fact person might be blind to its significance."

The Chief Constable smiled at this challenge.

" Try me," he said.

But Le Marinel remained very serious.

" Carey, what known act of Brisson's would you say most annoyed his brother-in-law ? "

After a little consideration the reply came.

" Well, I'd say it was when he put up the word Perigord in huge gilt letters over the entrance to his wine shop."

Le Marinel, his dark eyes sparkling, snapped his fingers.

" And the figure of Neptune, with the three gilt balls put up over the entrance to Perigord, that, too, had the same intention ; to bring de Quettville annoyance, derision and contempt. And my contention," the avocat concluded, striking one fist on his open palm, " is that both actions bear traces of the same mentality behind them."

For a second or two while we watched him Carey said nothing. Then I observed a flicker come to his eyes and he turned to McNab.

" And what is your opinion on this last point ? " he inquired.

" An excellent point," McNab said with enthusiasm, " delicate, subtle, almost convincing."

This did not satisfy Le Marinel.

" Why not quite convincing ? " he demanded.

McNab fidgeted in his chair.

" Well, its one weakness is psychological. The Neptune was transformed from a sea-god into a money-lender. That implied that whoever did this was thinking of de Quettville in terms of usury, and how many might be doing that you alone can tell us," McNab replied.

" As to that," the avocat admitted, " there are thirty-five who owe him very large amounts ; but only three who might have—well, gone to extreme lengths to escape their obligations. Still, none of the three is imaginative enough to have conceived the notion of erecting the Neptune over the gate. There is something so palpably Gallic in its satiric combination of humour and mockery, which, even if we had nothing else to go on, would connect Brisson with the affair."

Here Carey intervened brusquely.

" Dismiss the notion, Le Marinel, once for all. You see," he added quietly, " I *know* that whoever murdered de Quettville it was not Cæsar Brisson. I know it because all along we have been trying to trace the person who put up the figure on the gate, for we believed that person to be morally responsible for de Quettville's supposed insanity. The most promising clue we had was the set of finger-prints left on the gilded tennis balls, and as the first person I suspected naturally was Brisson, I had a glass stolen from the wine shop which he had just handled. The imprints on it were not those on any of the tennis balls. But that is not all. Brisson could not possibly have murdered any one on this island at the time supposed. For he was in France at the time. He left by the *Foam* for St. Malo on Thursday at 9 a.m. This I put beyond doubt by questioning both the master and the steward of the *Foam*, both men, of course, knowing Brisson. And both vouch for the fact that Brisson returned with them when the *Foam* returned and berthed

at the Albert Quay about 5 p.m. on the Saturday. Now as de Quettville was undoubtedly alive *after* Brisson left, and as, according to your own contention, de Quettville must have been dead before his return, is it not clear that whoever murdered de Quettville it was *not* Brisson ? "

Then as no one had any reply or comment to make, Carey, with a touch of his old raillery, himself suggested an explanation. " Unless indeed, Brisson, like Sir Boyle Roche's famous Irish bird, has, unknown to us, the faculty of being in two places at one time."

At this joke Le Marinel visibly writhed, and McNab sat as if turned to stone. For myself I could suggest no other explanation which would involve Cæsar Brisson. For I had undoubtedly seen de Quettville alive at 10.30 on the Thursday night, and I was no less sure from the state of the body that the man must have been dead before his return. And though de Quettville could have been dead for more than three days, he was certainly not dead on the Thursday morning when Brisson left on the *Foam*.

" No possibility of a return between Thursday and Saturday ? " McNab inquired.

" None. Dismiss the notion. We absolutely know that Brisson slept at the Hotel de Provence, St. Malo, on Thursday and Friday night. My own suspicion that he was behind the Neptune outrage was so strong that I investigated all his movements during the past ten days. I even got the *Chef de Police* in St. Malo to verify his identity, and trace his movements while he was there."

Le Marinel looked up wanly.

" They ought to know him. He formerly ran a low sort of café in St. Malo."

" So I understand," Carey said. " Anyway, it was established that he spent both Thursday and Friday evenings playing boule at the Casino."

Thus did Carey put the lid on our suspicion of Cæsar Brisson. And to clear Brisson was to clear Coquard also. This we at once recognised just as we saw that to involve Brisson would have implicated Coquard. For de Quettville had undoubtedly met his death by drowning, and homicide by drowning is, except in the case of new-born infants, the rarest of crimes. For the very good reason that murder by such a method is next to impossible for any person to achieve alone. And Coquard was a smaller man than de Quettville, much younger, no doubt, but probably nothing like so vigorous. Moreover, he as a stranger to the island, would not know his way about; and we had no evidence that he had ever set eyes on de Quettville. Was it conceivable that he alone, while Brisson took advantage of his help in the wine shop to transact a little business, and see old friends in St. Malo, could have murdered de Quettville by drowning? And without leaving a single mark on the body? It was not!

While these thoughts were passing through my mind as the others were talking, a word of the Chief Constable's caught my ear. He was saying something to the effect that if it could be proved de Quettville had been three days dead he would be more certain than he then was that a crime lay somewhere concealed in the affair. That roused me.

"By to-morrow," I said, "no one who looks at the man's face will be able to believe he was drowned this morning."

They knew what I meant, and the talk ended. Carey looked at his watch and rose.

"Till to-morrow then," he said with a sigh. "At present we have reached an *impasse*."

When he and Le Marinel were gone we did not feel like going to bed. So McNab, drawing up his chair to the table, produced his notebook and gave me some

account of his afternoon and evening's investigations at Perigord. Mrs. Bichard had talked freely to him as a sympathetic stranger, and shown him over the house. He had also seen the Neptune which, by Mr. Le Marinel's order, had been restored to Mère Trouteaud. She, too, talked to him in her garden, while he examined the figure-head, and told him of the bad luck which had followed its loss, of how her little dog, Mimi, had barked at sight of it on the pillar in the Perigord garden, when she had stolen in to see if the story of its being there was true. She told him of how the little dog—many other instances of whose wisdom he had to listen to—had been taken ill with grief over the loss of the holy figure, and had died the following night. And how on the following morning she had gone out to find a sheet she had left on the line to dry torn in shreds as if by evil spirits.

Then when he succeeded in escaping from Mère Trouteaud he had interviewed Sarchet, who could not be shaken in his story of seeing de Quettville making for the sea that morning. After that he had returned to Perigord to make measurements such as a surveyor might be expected to make, and it was while pacing out the distance between the pillar by the summer-house and the study window that he had discovered the broken knife blade among the weeds under the window. Having recognised from its shape and double edge that it might well be the balanced type of knife used for throwing, he had come away almost satisfied that it established a connection between de Quettville's death and the attack made on me.

"And now," he commented wearily, "I suppose there's nothing for it but to seek for the man among those debtors the lawyer told us of. Let's have another drop of that cheap whisky," he added with a sigh, beginning to fill his pipe.

While I was getting the decanter he went on: "We'll just have to get a list of debtors the wee lawyer mentioned, go through them on the *cui bono* principle, and a fine lengthy business that's likely to be. You'll notice, Dunn, that *cui bono* doesn't mean who profits *most*, but just who profits. That's where the Romans showed their good sense. For the man who, like Brisson here, stands to profit most by de Quettville's death, may not *need* the profit as much as another who stands to profit less. And after all, that's making the big assumption that this is a case of murder for gain, which is only one among the many motives that incite to murder."

But McNab seemed to cheer up after a sip or two of whisky. As soon as his pipe was drawing well he asked me for a sheet of paper on which to set down his clues.

"A big sheet," he said with much gravity. "I like to write them big; it seems to make them easier to read."

Now it did not appear to me that McNab had yet obtained enough in the way of clues to make it worth while to set them out on paper. And so after hunting out a sheet of quarto size it was with the keenest curiosity I placed myself behind his chair. Here is the list in the order he set the items down, as I read it over his shoulder:

Body recovered from the sea three days after death by drowning.

Possible clues:

1. Fragment of seaweed.
2. Ship's figure-head.
3. Watch stopped at 4.16.
4. Four gilt tennis balls.
5. A torn sheet.
6. A stolen rope.
7. A broken knife blade.

8. A barking dog
9. A scented handkerchief.
10. A broken clock.

McNab, having completed this surprising list, cocked his head to one side and regarded his list critically.

"Doubtless I've overlooked some items," he remarked, "and probably some I've set down are without significance, yet I have a notion that if we could sift out the worthless items, and set the remainder in their right order and relations, we would not be far away from a solution to the riddle."

But if this were true we evidently did not get the separate items into their right order that night; for by the time we went to bed no glimmer of a solution had dawned on our befogged minds.

But a glimmer came, and it came just when the actual dawn began to filter in at my window. I remember sitting up fully awake as a light percolated into the focus of my consciousness. I sat still for one moment to marvel why I had not thought of it sooner. The next moment I was out of bed and into my friend's room.

"McNab," I shouted at him, "McNab, *now* I see it."

CHAPTER XVII

BOQUET DE L'ILE

McNab sat up, rubbing his eyes. It did not take him long to get fully awake. He listened to my story with his arms behind his head. I poured out the facts at a speed which afforded him no chance of getting in a word. But having finished I sat down on his bed to hear his

comment. It was kindly, considering how stupid I had been.

"Memory," he said, "is a queer faculty. For while perfect in itself we blame it because there's a deficiency in our capacity to recall some particular fact from the depths of our minds. But the impression made by the fact is always there if we can find it. And for stimulating memory there's nothing to compare with a perfume. One whiff of a remembered scent and you are back in some old garden you had forgotten for half a life-time."

"But it wasn't a garden but a pub; and it wasn't a life-time but only last Saturday night."

"Oh, quite," he returned, with a yawn; "it's only the very aged who can go back a life-time, and forget what happened in a pub last week."

This was hardly fair. I had told him previously of what had taken place in the wine shop. Only, in concentrating on Brisson and Coquard, I had overlooked Mr. George Drury, since, by comparison, he seemed a person of no importance. And as a matter of fact it was the handkerchief rather than the perfume that had stimulated my remembrance of that scene between him and Judith Brisson. This scene I had now to repeat in great detail to McNab. The mere recital, above all, the particulars of the absurd quarrel between Drury and myself, served to open my eyes, now that Carey's vindication of Brisson compelled me to look somewhere else. And the moment I, as it were, looked behind Brisson and Coquard, there stood Mr. Drury, in his plus fours, with his truculent eyes, and the red rose in his button hole. It amazed me to see how, once my gaze fastened on him, all the facts tumbled into a coherent whole, like the separate pieces in a jig-saw puzzle. To McNab I began with the perfume.

"I can see Judith Brisson on the Saturday night," I

said, " touching his handkerchief with scent from a small squat bottle."

" And on Tuesday night it was still going strong ! Marvellous ! " McNab interjected. " I'd like to take a bottle back to England with me. You didn't hear its name ? " he inquired.

I wasn't sure he wasn't laughing at me. But I could not laugh myself.

" Oh, his handkerchief would have chances of repeated applications later," I said.

" And did she put the rose in her hair as girls do in the Pacific Islands ? " he asked in mock seriousness, to which I responded in the same vein.

" No, but he nearly put the knife into my ribs as the men do in the Pacific Islands."

" And supposing his godfather should be judged insane when he made his will, how much does Mr. Drury stand to lose ? "

" He stands to gain everything even then, if he brings it off with Miss Judith."

" So he might win both ways ? "

" And one way if not the other."

" What does he do for a living ? "

" At the moment he's a tomato grower and exporter. I understand he was trained to be an engineer ; but like so many sons of the clergy he went on the stage."

McNab opened his eyes with delight at this information.

" To play old men's parts, I suppose ? "

It was amazing how it all fitted together. Undoubtedly had my mind not been preoccupied with suspicion of Brisson and Coquard I could never have missed the truth. Apart altogether from the question of an alibi, to impersonate the dead man obviously needed some one perfectly familiar with the inside of de Quettville's house and the country around, which

Coquard certainly was not ; and the notion of a bullock like Brisson dressing up to masquerade as his brother-in-law—well, his very bulk would have made the attempt grotesque. I could have kicked myself to see how blind I had been. All this, of course, was what McNab had meant when he declared I could tell them much more of the affair than I had done. McNab lay on, arms behind his head, with his own thoughts, when I returned to my room.

Over breakfast, some hours later, we discussed the new situation. McNab who must have spent the interval in cogitation, had his list of eleven clues propped up against the sugar basin under his eyes. As presently appeared he was trying to rearrange the separate numbered items into a sequence which might tell its own story.

" It seems to me," he said, " that the time of death must be the Thursday night, soon after you saw him."

" Why not Friday ? " I inquired, that being the time I had all along considered most likely.

" Because it would mean that he was detained alive somewhere all through the Friday, a needlessly risky proceeding, which would almost certainly involve the necessity for having one confederate at the very least."

" Drury may have had an accomplice."

" Certainly. But I have learned never to assume an accomplice in murder till facts force me to do so. Murder in modern times is usually a lonely crime ; to have another in it doubles the risk and halves the gain."

" In that case he was not murdered at Perigord."

" Right ; he was not. One man could hardly have removed the body from the house to the seashore. But then even two men could not have forced him to rise from his bed and dress himself as he did without making an outcry, or leaving some signs of a struggle in the room. He must have been inveigled into going away on some

pretext, though heaven knows what, at that late hour, it could be, unless it had some pretended connection with his money-lending transactions. We'll try for something that may bear on that from the housekeeper after the inquest to-day. Then possibly we may learn who might have got into communication with him at that hour of the night. It could not be by a 'phone call, since they are not on the telephone."

After breakfast I left McNab to himself while I set off to get in a round of visits before leaving to attend the inquest at midday. Getting back about eleven I found McNab in a state of extreme impatience and unrest, the cause of which was a call that had come through from Colonel Carey from the hotel at Rocquane. Carey wanted us both at Perigord as soon as possible ; and though McNab had tried to get the reasons of his request, he had been unable to elicit anything, although it had been easy to divine from the Chief Constable's voice that something new had occurred. Carey would only say that what he had to tell us could not be conveyed by 'phone. But the mention of the place from which the call had come was sufficient. Carey, no doubt, had gone to the boat-house and had seen what I told him he would see.

We might have been late for the inquest had not the inquest itself been late in opening. When we reached Perigord we found the big hall occupied by what must have been the whole of the parish's adult population. Those connected more directly with the proceeding I picked out from the retired position near the door into which we had slipped. The first person to take my eye was the massive Brisson who sat beside a sharp-faced man at the far end near the coroner's table. Daniel Sarchet and the other man, Nicolle, was also there, as well as Mrs. Bichard and the frightened-looking maid, Alice Mauger. At the end of the table, the only person

on his feet, stood Sergeant Torode, like an expectant statue. Among the others the only ones known to me were Mrs. Blampied and her Claire, both in deep black, and Mr. George Drury seated in a corner. Opposite him, on chairs placed along the wall flanking the table, sat a dozen or so of men whose appearance suggested that they did not belong to the type of simple country folk among whom we sat. I had just decided after puzzling over them that they must be a selection of de Quettville's clients when the door leading to the study opened and Carey appeared, followed by Dr. Sullivant and a little man with glittering gold pince-nez and a little tidy white moustache, whom I judged to be the district coroner.

A gesture from the coroner as he was about to take his seat brought Le Marinel to his side, the avocat apparently having been seated where I could not see him behind Mrs. Blampied. Then Carey who had been talking to Torode with his eyes all the while searching the room, caught sight of us, and with a hurried word to the sergeant, he stepped quickly in our direction, nodding towards the door as he passed us. We took the cue and followed him. He was waiting for us on the steps under the immense Georgian portico.

"No need to wait," he said; "the coroner is going to adjourn after Brisson has given the formal evidence of identification."

"For further inquiries," I suggested.

"Yes," he said, eagerly yet amiably, taking us each by an arm. "Come where we can talk in peace. I've got two really big things to tell."

We walked round the house, across the neglected land to the tree-studded park beyond. But he did not wait till we reached it.

"You were quite right," he said to me as soon as we were clear of the house. "Sullivant supported your assertion when he saw the body this morning."

And though I knew he must agree, it meant much to me then to have Sullivant's backing. The unusual glow I felt on hearing the news was evidence of that.

"The fact that the man has been dead for about three days will not come out in court to-day?" McNab asked.

Carey assured him that nothing at all could come out in evidence that day. No one would object to the adjournment except perhaps Brisson, who had attended with his own avocat to establish de Quettville's insanity. This information made me welcome the adjournment with real fervency; for I had an idea that if Brisson remembered half of what I had said to him in his wine shop, that sharp-nosed avocat would call on me for evidence in support, and, if he got an opening, would put me through it when I had to testify as to de Quettville's condition on the Thursday night. The mere sense of relief was so intense that I forgot Carey had mentioned a second piece of news. But McNab had not.

"And the other news item?"

The reminder brought a beaming smile to Carey's face. Out came his cigarette case.

"Ah, that is so good that I wish it had been better. I'm not complaining, though! It's a thing that will show you we can accomplish something ourselves, and aren't going to owe everything to you." He held out his case to McNab. "But perhaps you despise the cigarette," he said. McNab accepted the offer.

"Not at all," he said. "I like a cigarette when I'm not smoking."

McNab's dry humour was new to Carey, and after staring a moment he laughed. But his light heartedness, which indicated his satisfaction with the progress made in the matter of de Quettville, made us more impatient to hear what his discovery was.

"It came about in this way," the Chief began. "Last

night Brisson and his avocat, Simon, were out at Perigord, ostensibly, since Brisson's daughter is heir-at-law, to see to the arrangements about the identification, but really, there is no doubt, to ferret out any facts which would tend to establish de Quettville's insanity. For, of course, will or no will, Judith Brisson inherits Perigord. That gave Brisson his standing. But they found Mr. Drury here, and some others, the two trustees, Mrs. Blampied and Clare, as well as other expectant godchildren. At one point something like a scene threatened between Drury and Brisson, but it ended with the pair treating the company to some of de Quettville's cognac which they got from the housekeeper.

"That is where the story begins, really. You see, Torode happened to be out fixing things up for to-day's inquest. So when Mrs. Bichard, upset by the way she had just been put through it by Simon, besides being quite unused to entertaining guests, lost her head when it came to drinks all round and then my sergeant pretty well took over management, with the assistance of Alice, the parlourmaid. Torode learned to be a handy chap in India. And in India he learned more than how drinks should be served. In our life out there he learned to develop his imagination. And aware of the search I'd been making to trace the originals of the finger-prints on the tennis balls, every time Alice brought back an empty glass used by anyone whose finger-prints we had not yet seen, he got the user's name from her. Then he gave her a fresh one and stealthily slipped the other into his little brief bag. For he argued that among all this assembly of people interested in, or connected with, Perigord there very likely would be the one individual whose identity interested me. And he was right, too! The man concerned in putting the Neptune over the gateway was there. We got the same

imprints on one of the glasses as we already had on one of the tennis balls."

" But not those of the woman concerned ? " McNab asked.

" No, but her identity is bound to come out, since we now *know* who the man is," Carey rejoined with the air of one who expects to startle his hearers.

" Ah," McNab said, " so Mr. George Drury's game is up."

Carey caught his cigarette as it dropped from his mouth.

" Good Lord, how did *you* know ? " he cried.

McNab soon rattled off the story, and Carey, who was quick to perceive how every detail answered to the needs of the case, listened with eyes that glowed satisfaction.

He and McNab put their heads together after that over the next step to be taken, and it was decided that Carey alone must interview Drury. There was to be no suggestion of murder, not even a hint that he was concerned in the attack on me. But as it was generally known that Carey had been endeavouring to trace the person or persons responsible for the erection of the ship's figure-head, he was merely to seek an explanation from Drury as to how and when he had handled the tennis ball placed on the trident. And as this act did not constitute a criminal offence, Drury was to be left to suppose that he was in for no more than a reprimand as one responsible for a joke in very bad taste.

We did not return to the house with Carey, for that might suggest to Drury, when approached by the Chief Constable, that he was going to hear something about the knife throwing incident, a much more serious affair which he would assuredly deny. Fortunately our talk with Carey had taken place too far from the house for us to be observed from the windows.

We ourselves, after telling Carey where to find us, went off in the direction of Mère Trouteaud's cottage, McNab bent on another talk with the old woman. As we made for the lane I felt that the rope was already as good as round Drury's throat. He was a type I knew, this son of a calculating clergyman ; he had learned to hold life cheap during his sojourn on some Pacific island. He had, we knew, been staying with his godfather at the very time the will was made, and no doubt in an expansive moment the old man had told him of its contents and thereby sealed his own fate.

McNab shook his head.

" It's going to be hard to bring anything home to him," he said.

Mère Trouteaud's home was a white-washed one-storey cottage of the humblest type. But it had a fair-sized garden, facing south, and out of its fertile soil and the hen run abutting the cottage, no doubt most of the old woman's living came. A stone path led across to the sun-blistered door on which McNab knocked. Getting no response to a second knock he tried the latch and found it locked. We resolved to wait, having told Carey where to find us, and after a look round the garden sought for something on which to sit down. But the domain boasted no garden seat, Mère Trouteaud probably having no time in which to rest in her garden. So we sat down on the coping of the well beside the gate. I reverted to McNab's assertion about the difficulty of bringing home the crime to Drury. But McNab reiterated his opinion.

" We have no direct evidence at all to connect him with any crime," he said.

" What about the knife ? " I asked.

" The knife blade, you mean. Nobody could identify that as his property. It would be another matter if we got the handle. But he would hardly keep that."

" Well, there's the handkerchief on which the Brisson

girl put the perfume ; he certainly kept that, for he had it when I tackled him in the dark, which probably means that he is keeping it for sentimental reasons."

This suggestion disgusted McNab.

" Och, man, it probably only means that his laundry day comes later in the week," he cried in contempt.

After that I refrained from further suggestions.

" You see," he resumed, " it's the method of the murder that creates the difficulty. The man was drowned and as I heard you say yourself, homicidal drowning is one of the ratest methods used in murder. No doubt because it is so difficult. But this man managed it. That is what is bothering me. Don't tell me he isn't clever. Short of getting a confession I do not see how we are to get a conviction."

Just then the gate opened with a squeal of rusty hinges and Carey appeared. I could read nothing on his face.

" Well ? " McNab said as Carey stood over us.

" A flat denial," he nodded. " It's hardly credible. I told him we had his finger-prints on the ball, and he told me he didn't care a damn, he had never touched any tennis ball."

" That means he's alarmed."

" He's not. Angry if you like, but not scared in the least, believe me. What's more, with the utmost self-assurance he instantly produced an alibi. Said he couldn't have handled the ball as he went to Sark on the morning of the Friday night on which the figure-head was put up, and returned only last Saturday evening."

McNab smiled.

" A very neat alibi that. It exactly covers not only the Friday night on which the Neptune was stuck up, but also the following Friday on which we suspect de Quettville was murdered."

" Yes," Carey nodded. " I noticed that ; it looks

rather too pat and neat. I was asking him only about the first Friday, and as if he knew what lay behind, out came an alibi for the whole affair."

"You are testing it?"

"Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, Torode is now going hell for leather to catch the afternoon boat. He'll stay the night in Sark to make his inquiries so as to be sure of catching his people at home. But even so the results may not be decisive. For Drury said he spent much of his time fishing, and after all there's only seven miles between the two islands."

"Night fishing, I suppose?" McNab suggested.

"Yes."

"From a boat?"

"Yes."

"And alone?"

"No," Carey unexpectedly replied. "No, he said he went out with the brothers Bongourd, Nicolas and Henry."

This jerked up McNab; it was as if he had hit himself against a rock.

"Oh," he said, recovering after a minute. "Well, I'd like to see the brothers Nicolas and Henry."

"You think there's a hole in the alibi?" Carey asked hopefully.

"There must be. But is your Sergeant Torode likely to get his finger to it?"

"Certainly; he has all the necessary local knowledge at his finger-tips; knows all there is to know of tides and distances and times, not to mention the family of Bongourds."

"Anything against them?"

"Nothing whatever; they belong to a well-known Sark family; their ancestors have fished the sea, and done a little farming there for centuries probably."

McNab jumped from his seat on the well.

" All right ; that means he has no alibi. It also means that Drury knows we are on his track for actual murder. He's frightened ; he did not give you credit for being up in finger-print work. The adjourned inquest alarmed him first of all ; so when you came, he named these well-known Bongourds to give himself time to get away before you could find out the facts about his alleged trip to Sark."

" I'm overlooking none of that," Carey replied ; " but as for giving himself time to make his getaway, you overlook the difficulty of that on an island like this. One officer alone at the White Rock would stop him going aboard any boat. But it is a fact that Drury *was* in Sark part of the time at least, for you see I saw him there myself, last Wednesday, just a week ago to-day."

McNab, however, was unshaken.

" Very well," he said more quietly, " I'll go to Sark myself. There's some sleight of hand in all this. Not this time the sleight of hand displayed in knife throwing, but the kind that may well know how to throw dust in the eyes of Sergeant Torode."

And go to Sark we did. Although the *Courier* had left before we reached the quay, McNab was too keen on the scent to wait another day. So we hired a motor launch, and were soon skimming over the pellucid sea with the water sounding a rapid plip-plop at our bow, and a hissing stream astern. We watched the enchanted island grow steadily in size and detail, till, in what seemed an incredibly short time, we were slipping along under its vast heights, with wheeling sea birds high overhead, showing like wind-blown snowflakes against the dark mass of the cliffs.

But that day neither of us had an eye for the beauties of nature, our thoughts being too much preoccupied with the one example of the ugliness of human nature we had come to investigate. McNab was on edge all the way, and

had been ever since he jumped from his seat on the coping of the well in Mère Trouteaud's garden. He was frightened, I think, that Drury would, after all, slip clear in some way he could not divine. Carey had spoken of the complete self-assurance with which Drury produced his alibi; and I knew it was the self-assurance, rather than the alibi, that troubled McNab.

It did not take us long to discover the ground on which Drury's self-assurance was founded. For as soon as we shot through the tall, narrow entrance of the little Creux harbour we came on Sergeant Torode and a fisherman, engaged in examining a boat standing on the slip. Torode was doing some head scratching as he listened to the other man, who with outstretched palms was laying off explanations at a great rate in a querulous high-pitched voice. The sergeant took our appearance without surprise.

"This is the boat," he said. "Nicolas Bongourd here says they were out last Friday night, on the north-east of the island."

We examined the boat, a mere rowing skiff without fixtures for sails, or for fitting on an outboard motor.

"Speaks for itself, don't it, sir?" Torode mumbled.

"But it has been calm weather for a week or two, hasn't it?" McNab suggested.

The sergeant smiled pityingly.

"You mean rowing? Yes, there's been no wind, but the tide don't stop running fourteen knots out there between the islands." He gave the little boat a kick. "If you was to try it you'd find yourself near the Casquets on one tide, and somewhere off Jersey on the next. But you can try if you like."

We knew the sergeant was suggesting not that McNab should try to row the seven miles to Guernsey and back, but that he could try to overturn the alibi. And this he did try, Torode quickly conducting us over the ground

he had already covered. We interviewed people at the hotel, inspected the books, talked with both the brothers Bongourd later on, and never once did the shadow of a discrepancy appear.

"You can't break that alibi, sir," Torode said as we left the Bongourds' cottage, "it's an alibi as watertight as the Lower Head buoy. It can't be broke, because it's right what Mr. Drury says about his being here when he says he was."

And with half an eye I could see that McNab himself had now reached the same conviction.

As we descended the long hill towards the harbour dusk was falling, and from the slope on either side of the road there reached us the greeny smell of dew-drenched bracken and gorse. Deep in the gloom of the high granite quay our launch sat waiting. By the time we were under way the darkness had swallowed up the larger islands. But away in the far distance across the waste of black waters I could see the Hanois light which marked the south-east corner of Guernsey. Its rapid succession of flashes made it seem like a knowing eye winking derision.

CHAPTER XVIII

CLIMAX

FOR several days the case was at a standstill so far as we were concerned. I tried to put it out of my mind. If McNab thought about it, as I have no doubt he did, he gave me no indications beyond an occasional brooding and gloomy absent-mindedness. We played golf at L'Ancresse in the afternoon, went for a swim in the early mornings, did a good amount of walking; and had one glorious sailing trip among the smaller islands.

Gossip about the de Quettville affair floated around the town, and occasionally I had to listen to some of it from my patients. But no suggestion of any crime leaked out, the gossip relating exclusively to the fight expected between Brisson on the one hand and the legatees, of whom the chief were Mr. Drury and Mrs. Blampied, on the other. Brisson, it was said, disputed the will on the ground of de Quettville's insanity on the date it was executed.

Thus the time passed till the eve of the day on which the inquest fell to be resumed. Public interest was now roused over the result, it being said that the adjournment had been for the purpose of obtaining the real facts about de Quettville's mental condition, since so much hung on the verdict. In the interval stories of de Quettville's strange doings just before his death got into active circulation, and it was generally held that the verdict would be one of suicide during temporary insanity. There were those, indeed, who asserted that de Quettville had never been of sound mind since the day his fiancée ran away with his younger brother.

Of Le Marinel I was then seeing little or nothing, he being so preoccupied with the legal work entailed by the expected dispute over the succession to the estate. As for Chief Constable Carey, he might now have reverted to his original theory of suicide for all we heard, though I had an idea he was working away at inquiries about the movements of the more shady characters among de Quettville's debtors.

It will thus be seen that with the complete establishment of the alibis of our own principal suspects the case came to a standstill. To a standstill that is, so far as action was concerned, but certainly not so far as concerned thought. I found it impossible to keep the thing out of my mind. Though he said little or nothing I judged McNab to be in the same condition of mental

turmoil, yet I knew that later on he spent his mornings, while I was professionally engaged, doing some quiet investigation about the town.

Then on the eve of the resumed inquest he spoke, abruptly, yet so naturally that I could see how continuously the subject had been occupying his thoughts.

"Dunn, there's just one absolute certainty I hang on to," he said.

"Yes?" I replied, well aware he referred to the Perigord murder.

"Finger-prints cannot be faked. Drury beyond doubt did handle that ball."

"But you were satisfied with his alibi," I said.

"Entirely. Brisson's too, for if Drury couldn't do seven miles from Sark, Brisson couldn't do the fifty from St. Malo. It's another alibi that bothers me now—that of the corpse itself."

This time I did not credit my ears.

"That what?" I cried, horrified.

"The corpse—you would call it the cadaver, no doubt—I'm sure now that the secret is concerned with de Quettville's body. There was no hanky-panky about Drury's alibi, but I fancy it's a trick with the body if I can only discover what the trick was, that will explain how we've been fooled."

"But——"

"Wait a moment." He cut me short almost fiercely. "I'm going to see Drury presently, to see if I can find out just when he set his fingers on that gilded tennis ball. I'm going to set that ball rolling to-night, Dunn. To-night I'm going to start that ball rolling, and see where it leads me."

"Where do you suppose it——" I began, but again he stopped me with vehemence.

"No, no! Your questions can wait; mine cannot wait. Look here now! Carry your mind back to the

time we entered the boat-house. You said the first thing that surprised you was that de Quettville's face showed no discoloration."

"And I told you why. In cases of drowning the blood flows into the head and produces a flushed appearance."

"And if de Quettville had been, say, laid on his back and somehow maintained in that position, perhaps at low water till the tide came in over him, would that account for what you saw?"

"Yes."

"Of if he had been drowned in an upright position?"

"That too would account for it."

The replies appeared to give McNab satisfaction. He bent forward to run his eye over the list of clues entered in his notebook, and I guessed he had got something that made him hopeful of re-arranging them in a more illuminating sequence. But the next question in his catechism surprised me.

"When exactly did you arrive in Guernsey?"

"On Monday the twelfth of this month, by the evening boat."

"And your friend, Dr. Wright, he left next day, I take it?"

"No, he stayed on till the Thursday. He wanted to show me the ropes, and introduce me to such patients as needed particular attention."

"But de Quettville was not one of these?"

"Oh, no. Wright only introduced me to a few patients in the town, chiefly old ladies who might be touchy over a stranger. Besides, de Quettville was not ill when he left."

"So Dr. Wright left, of course, on the day before the Neptune was set up over the gateway," McNab said, half to himself. "Good! And there it stood till Monday when it was taken down by de Quettville's order, put on a pillar in his garden to keep it from again being used to

mock him. Then on the Tuesday night Mère Trouteaud slips into the garden as soon as it is dark, and her dog, Mimi, barks at the figure," McNab ran on, staring down at his notebook, and passing a hand through his hair. He looked up at me suddenly. " Why did the dog not bark on the Wednesday night ? "

" You forget, McNab, the dog was dead on the Wednesday."

" Ah, yes—the poor little noisy dog was dead on the Wednesday, and that, if I remember, was the beginning of much bad luck for Mère Trouteaud."

At this point I became quite sure McNab had got on to something. In fact, I remember that the word "noisy" made me catch my breath for a second and sit up.

" Yes," I said, " the old woman's catalogue of her misfortunes is easily remembered : the clock fell off the wall, the lamp burst, her baking got burned or something on another day——"

McNab stopped me.

" Never mind what happened *inside* her house ; it's what happened outside that is important."

" Oh, well," I said, trying to keep calm, " only two things happened outside. Some neighbour stole her well-rope, and tore up a sheet or two she had left out to dry overnight. But I forget what day that ill-luck belonged to."

" The Thursday, the morning after the dog died, and the same morning on which Miss Blampied, looking out of her window, saw the Neptune had fallen from the pillar."

" Does that mean much ? " I inquired.

He snapped his notebook and began to smooth down his ruffled hair.

" It all hangs together. But it is the old woman's wee doggie that sets me on the trail. Do you not see anything yet, Dunn ? No ? Well, I'll have to give you

an explanation when I come back. Not that I see everything myself yet."

I got to my feet in protest.

"You're not going to leave me out?" I cried.

He held up his hand.

"No, certainly not. But I'm going now to see Mr. George Drury at one of his haunts—not the Perigord these days—and as you and he parted on pretty warm terms, he would be very quick to suspect my purpose if I approached him in your company."

Something odd in his manner of saying this caught my ear.

"McNab, there's some danger in what you're going to do to-night," I asserted.

"Danger?" he repeated, savouring the word slowly. "Man, my kind of work has always that possibility in it. But I've noticed that the precise amount of danger is determined by the way a thing is done. In my work as in your own, tact is an indispensability."

After that I could, of course, say no more. It was clear he considered my presence would increase his danger; but the fact that danger had now to be faced left me very uneasy.

After he had gone I sat on recalling the separate events, chiefly the knife which had so narrowly missed me on the night of my quarrel with Drury. Fortunately, just then a 'phone call which I expected might come next day, took me off to a case; and presently my thoughts were occupied with the beginning of life rather than with its end.

It was some two hours later—eleven-twenty by my watch—before I found myself free from the case, and in a position to think of something else. Outside I found the night as sultry as the room I had just left, the night air coming hot and heavy to the lungs. Straightening myself as I began to walk homeward down the road I

saw the sky overcast with great, rolling masses of deep violet cloud, shot with sulphurous patches here and there. It looked as if before morning the hot spell was going to break in a really racketty thunderstorm.

But it was anxiety to hear McNab's news that made me quicken my pace almost to a run. I made sure he would be back in the house again. It was almost three hours since he had left. Then I wondered what I could do if he had not returned. Before reaching a decision my latch key was in the lock. As I set down my bag, I looked at the hall table on which notes were left for me, and saw one envelope so propped up as to draw immediate attention. Believing it to be a 'phone call to another case which had been taken down by the housekeeper, I picked it up, and saw my name in McNab's neat little handwriting. The printed address of the Chief Constable's office headed the message:

If you want to be in at the death come to Perigord and be prepared if necessary to give professional assistance.

Never have I jumped to any call as I did to that! My first act was to ring up the garage, and then when I had got together a set of emergency dressings and other professional necessities, I got on to the police office for fuller particulars. The officer in charge knew about the message to me. He himself had brought it up after McNab had called me on the 'phone and learned I had gone off to a case. This was about ten minutes before eleven. But beyond telling me that the Chief, accompanied by the sender of the message, and Sergeant Torode with three constables, had left in two cars, he could not, or would not, say any more.

I knew they must have gone off to make an arrest. Quite apart from their numbers, the very fact that McNab had sent his message from the Chief Constable's

office was itself significant. He had gone there hot foot with information that led Carey to take instant action, as I saw before my own car reached the outskirts of the town. And McNab's message by itself was decisive, implying that Carey found the evidence McNab had obtained that night and placed before him, to be conclusive. McNab had read the riddle: this was the end!

My driver did not go fast enough for me. He may have been resentful over a tip from his last fare. I had to wake him up.

"Is it a matter of life and death?" he asked.

"Death," I replied, and though this may have befogged him, he got a bit more out of his engine. And then, just as we slowed down to take the curve through the Perigord gateway a figure in policeman's uniform stepped into our headlights with uplifted hand. As he came along I recognised him for a St. Peter Port officer I'd seen about the streets.

"Dr. Dunn?" he inquired at the window.

"What is it?" I returned.

"He's got away, sir," the constable cried breathlessly, "and we're scattering after him. I was to use your car when you turned up, to get towards Icart Point."

He was soon in beside me, and the driver, now aware he was on a livelier adventure than a sick call, at once began to show us the wonders he could get out of his antique vehicle. From the officer I got the facts, so far as they were known to him, but, as it were, in spasms, during the brief intervals when we were not whirling round corners, or negotiating hairpin bends in narrow lanes, which threw us now to one side, now to the other of the rocking car.

"We hadn't enough men," the officer admitted, "not for such a big rambling old house. All the same I think he must have got wind we were coming."

"You didn't try to surround the house?"

"Not what you'd call surround it. I was outside myself, so were Brache and Falla; but we reckoned to get him unawares, really. It was Falla sees him drop from the window before the others were well inside the house, or we had got properly set, as you might say." Here he clutched at me involuntarily as the car just cleared a perilous corner. "Lord, good the rain's not started, or we'd be standing on our heads in that ditch," he declared. "Well, sir, as I was saying, Falla sees him all right, but coming so unexpected like that, and so quick, took Falla by surprise, and the man was off like a hare across the park before Falla got back breath enough to shout. They reckon he'll make for Saints' Bay to get one of the boats moored there. That's where the sergeant and Falla have gone, and the idea for you and me, sir, is to lay up on Icart Point."

"Icart—on a night like this a brigade could hide on Icart," I said.

"Yes, sir, but they reckoned the moon would be up as soon as we reached it; and the idea was that we might sight him as he came on, and if we all missed him there'd still be the sergeant and Falla watching over the boats."

Just then a sound like the distant roll of drums came to our ears, and the torn, sulphurous-edged clouds I had already observed told me it was not drums but distant thunder.

"Looks as if we may presently have something stronger to see him by than moonlight," I said.

The officer, letting down the window, craned his neck to get a look at the heavens.

"It may pass us by," he said; "there's no wind nor rain."

As if to belie this hope a second peal, louder and angrier, came, and a short tattoo of heavy raindrops sounded on the roof of the car. But no more followed,

and before long we had left the hedge-bordered road and were travelling over an open space, on a rougher road bordered by gorse and bracken. The vague feeling of being on a great height came to me just as the officer told the driver to pull up.

"Reckon the headlights can be seen for miles out here, and we dursent go on without them," he murmured to me as we got out.

"You can turn here," he said to the man, "then you cut off home."

The man's face, he was a young fellow, looked appealingly back from the gloom of the car.

"There's no hurry, Mr. Dorey," he said.

P.C. Dorey turned on him.

"What's the idea, Tostevin? Think you're likely to pick up a fare here, eh? You be off."

"Can't I stay on and see the fun? Who is it you're after?" he pleaded.

But Dorey was adamant, telling him we could have no loitering there, and threatening him with the loss of his licence. When he had gone we left the road and set off across the headland.

Icart Point I had previously seen but once. That was during an afternoon walk with McNab a few days earlier. Then I had been struck with the wildness of its plateau, dotted all over with gorse, bramble bushes and bracken, and intersected with sheep and rabbit runs. Towards the sea the ground began to slope down, and across this slope ran a narrow pathway, safe enough in daylight and dry weather, but safe only then; for in many places the path passed close to the edge of the cliff, and to slip, or miss the path in the dark, was to be lost, since a yard or so away there was a drop of about two hundred feet. But no one would go there in the dark, I suppose, the path appearing to exist entirely for the magnificent view it opened out seawards.

I recalled that path as we threaded our way among the gorse, and made up my mind that though I might watch it, nothing would induce me to set foot on it that night. Before we had crossed the level ground, however, the storm which had been threatening so long, broke on us at last. It came with the impetuosity and fury of a roaring monster enraged by long detention. The sudden detonation right over our heads sounded as if the heavens had burst. We had forgotten the sky in our keenness to watch the earth. As we pulled up, involuntarily, the lightning flashed past us in silent brilliance, dazzling our eyes for a second, and then leaving us in darkness. But no rain yet fell, and we pushed on to get nearer the bigger bushes which Dorey said grew close to the slope above the cliff's edge. It was among those bushes we had meant to post ourselves, since from there we had a clear sight of the path which crossed the bare slope, Dorey's idea being that our man would take to that path, since nobody else would be willing to do it, and he only because it was now neck or nothing with him.

Reaching the point where the bushes ended and the bare slope began just as another terrific clap of thunder went off into echoing reverberations, we came to a halt. We knew that here a wide expanse would in ordinary conditions lie before us, but at that moment it looked no more than a wall of inky blackness. The next instant the whole leapt into intense distinctness as a rod of forked lightning went by, hissing like a rocket. Then darkness rose again, and the thunder, like salvos of artillery, shook the ground beneath our feet. The exhilaration of the storm took hold of me, and the air, which had been so hot and dead, now seemed fresh and vital. It was impossible now for any one to come along the cliff path unseen, for the flashes came too frequently, following at once on the thunderous uproar, which indeed seemed almost continuous.

" It's right overhead," Dorey said.

" And here comes the rain," I answered.

Dorey dived for a clump of bushes growing around a small tree as a sudden sluicing sheet of rain dropped on us. But it was poor shelter. In ten minutes we were both so wet that further wetting did not matter.

This deluge, however, led to what followed. A hurried consultation with Dorey convinced me that now the cliff path was impassable. It simply could not be used. And any one caught on it in the midst of that torrent would be forced to cut up the slope to the more level ground. This reduced our chances, and to make the most of such a chance as we had left to us I agreed to leave Dorey to patrol northwards while I myself went along in the other direction, the understanding being that every twenty minutes we were both to return to the spot where we then were, which was marked by the tree among the bushes.

An hour passed in this way and we met thrice.

Then something happened.

It must have been about half-past two. At the moment I had reached the extreme limit of my beat and was standing facing the slope watching a zig-zag flare of lightning go fizzing and crackling towards the sea, when in the death-like silence that followed a thunder-clap I heard a sound behind me. But quickly as I wheeled round, I was not quick enough; the darkness fell like a shutter, and I had to wait till the next flash. The intervals were longer now, for the storm was moving southwards. Probably, I told myself, I would see nothing. There could be nothing to see. Even if it had only been a rabbit breaking cover I would not see it now. And all the time I was telling myself this I knew it was not a rabbit, and waited for the next revealing flash. I thought it would never come. Indeed, my eyes, now no longer unfocused by the

frequency of the blinding flashes, were beginning to see better, and I wondered whether the dawn was at hand. Or was it the morn, no longer entirely blanketted by cloud, that was throwing out this faint, watery light?

I dared not look up to see. I dared not take my eyes away from the direction from which the small sound had come to my ear. But before the flash came I think I knew who it was. Something in the blood warned me. And then, between two breaths, the lightning, little more than a reflection now, lit up the earth, and I found myself staring into the eyes of—Catulle Coquard.

He was peering at me out of a bush. I had time to see that there was murder in his eyes and that he had the necessary instrument in his right hand; a pistol whose barrel shone for an instant like quicksilver. I just saw the muzzle veer straight at me and I jumped as the shot rang out. Dodging round the nearest bushes, I made some ground, perhaps a hundred yards, and then caught my left foot in a rabbit hole and almost pitched straight over the edge of the slope above the cliffs. But the rabbit hole held me, though as I fell and twisted round on my back I knew too well what that wrench on my ankle meant.

The bone was not fractured and for a moment I rejoiced in this knowledge till I remembered that it would not matter either way, since Coquard would now come round the bush and finish me off. I remember striving to see the edge of the bush round which I expected him to come. But he did not come. Had he missed seeing which way I had jumped and gone to look in the wrong direction? Did he think his bullet had found me, and that there was no need to look anywhere? No, it was not that! Somewhere near a twig snapped and I knew he was searching for me.

But a thought came to me, and I managed to get my foot clear of the hole. My one hope was to sham death,

and so, although it took me nearer the edge of that perilous slope, I wriggled over to cover the rabbit hole from view. For to allow him to see what had brought me down would make him shoot again.

It took him a long time to find me, but find me he did at last. I saw him come round the bush, no more than a creeping shadow which stopped the instant he caught sight of me. The storm had entirely passed now, and the steady increase in the light showed me it was not moonlight but the dawn. I did not want to die and tried not to think. After the storm a hush seemed to be on everything. Under my dropped eyelids I saw Coquard draw nearer. He was not sure I was dead, nor whether I had a weapon. But he did not come very near. And as he stopped his arm went up, and under my closed lids I could see the muzzle of his pistol pointing straight at my face. The impulse to move was almost irresistible, though I knew I could neither get away nor get at him. So I lay still, shamming the stiff, awkward position of one who has tumbled to the earth dead. He did not fire at once. There was a hesitation which was to me as unaccountable as it was agonising. The weapon was lowered and raised—more than once. Then I seemed to understand, and the first ray of real hope came so suddenly to my brain that it seems a miracle I did not betray myself by a movement.

I saw he did not want to fire, if only he were sure I was dead. He did not want to fire *now* in case the shot would be heard. In the midst of the storm a pistol shot was nothing, but now in this great quietness it was another matter. Then abruptly he seemed to make up his mind that there was no need for a second shot, for he came right up and stood over me, considering, I suppose, what might happen if my body were found there. It did not take him long to perceive the best method of dealing with me. When I felt a kick land on

my ribs I knew he was going to send me hurtling down that slope and over the cliff to the beach below. But I was much too heavy to be sent over in that fashion. He did not, however, at once stop kicking me. Dead as he thought me, he liked sending his toe hard against my ribs too well for that.

Then he did what I had hoped he would do; he pocketed his pistol and bent down to roll me over the edge. That was the moment I had waited for, prayed for and died three times over to bring about. At last he was safely within reach. I got him by both his wrists as he was in the act of stooping before he knew it, entirely off his guard, and almost defenceless in the shock of his surprise. But I did not prolong his agony though he had prolonged mine. My fierce desire for instant satisfaction was too great for that.

Shifting one hand to his ankle as I drew him over me, I heaved myself up, and sent him hurtling over before he had time to do more than make a despairing grab at me with his free hand. I only saved myself from going over too, by getting my left foot into the same rabbit hole which had landed me.

At first he rolled down that slope, which from where I lay looked like the steep slope of a high-pitched roof. I could see his arms flying in frantic clutches at the turf. The next moment he spun round when he struck some inequality in the ground, and I saw him as he slid forward, endeavouring to check himself by wild digs of his heels at the earth. But the momentum he had gathered was too great to be arrested by anything less solid than the granite boulders two hundred feet below. And the last sight I had of Catulle Coquard was when, a mere small black object in the distance, he shot like a bird out into space, over the cliff, and dropped like a stone towards them. Then I must have fainted clean away.

CHAPTER XIX

THE COST OF A GALLOWS

IT was in my rooms that night that they settled on the evidence which was to be offered next day at the inquest. They had to come to me because I was on a couch with a twisted ankle and two broken ribs. P.C. Dorey, coming in search of me when I failed to turn up, had found me lying on the cliff's edge, and after rendering first aid had gone off for help to transport me home.

" Well," Le Marinel was saying, " all along I said the Chief would get them by the finger-prints." He looked over at me. " Didn't I say that on the Saturday when you went into the wine shop? Of course, the fellow didn't suppose that the little island of Guernsey could boast a finger-print expert like Carey."

Carey looked at McNab apologetically.

" Forgive this outburst of local patriotism," he said. " We all know that without your constructive imagination my technical knowledge would not have carried us far."

Now this kind of talk was all very well between Le Marinel, Carey and McNab. They had been together all day, and were in full possession of all the facts. But I had been out of things since Dorey took me home that morning, and knew nothing of the day's developments. So I cut in to the talk.

" If there's to be a vote taken on the question of pre-eminence," I said, " may I remind you that I am not in possession of all the facts? "

" As to that "—Le Marinel nodded—" there's something I don't know either, but I know the problem

was to destroy the alibis, and that this was accomplished in the end by our Chief Constable's intimate knowledge of finger-prints technique."

But Carey would not have this.

"No," he declared firmly. "You've got it at the wrong end, Le Marinel. My technique, as you call it, was applied merely to find out who was concerned in annoying an old man by erecting his effigy over his gate. The notion of crime never entered my head, not even when the evidence was thrust under my nose in the boat-house, over the man's body."

"Not evidence," McNab protested; "that scrap of seaweed in the watch was merely an odd thing that called for explanation. The first real evidence came from Dunn when he convinced me that the man must have been dead for not less than three days."

"Ye-s—not less than three days," Le Marinel murmured.

They exchanged glances, and I divined they shared some knowledge between them which had not yet been disclosed to me. Then as I wondered what it could be, and was resolving to drag it from them, McNab continued:

"Dunn's evidence indicated crime of some sort. For here was some person masquerading as the dead man, entering the dead man's house, wearing, mark you, the clothes in which the body was afterwards found. Quite apart from the knife throwing incident of which Dunn was the intended victim, this last fact impressed me by the determined purpose that must lie behind it. For by the moonlight which came through the keyhole, Dunn observed the very pattern of the cloth the man whom he tried to overpower was wearing, and Dunn saw those same clothes on the body a few hours later. But they must have been worn by some one else, who stripped and re-clothed the body between the time

Dunn saw him in the house and the time when they were found on de Quettville again.

"Now when you think of it, to unclothe and reclothe a body in such a way, that is a thing no one is likely, to put it grossly, to do for nothing. In fact, it would have to be a man of a very callous nature to do it at all. Here, then, was presumptive evidence, not only of some crime, but of a crime which might, from the cold-blooded character of the perpetrator, well be of a very brutal kind. But so far we had no evidence of murder. That evidence, however, was not long delayed. And it also came from Dunn."

McNab paused with his eyes on Carey. But I had got tired of the repetition of my name, and felt that there was something defensive in the way McNab was making it recur.

"Oh, leave my name out," I cried. "No one is more conscious of the blunder I made than myself."

This time the three avoided looking at each other. But McNab looked across at me with kindly eyes.

"Credit where credit is due," he said. "But for you this murder might have gone undetected."

"So far as concerns myself, I entirely agree," Carey nodded.

"Well," McNab resumed, "where was I? Oh, yes, I was saying that as yet we had no evidence of actual murder. But that came the moment I got further facts from Dunn, bearing on the facial discoloration of the drowned. This discoloration is caused by the fact that in a floating body the head sinks lower because of its greater weight. But de Quettville's face revealed no discoloration, therefore, his body *had not floated.* I ascertained that no discoloration would occur if the person prior to death had been held either in a flat or upright position. It did not take long to decide which was the position. First, he had *not* been drowned in

the sea at all. The body, when recovered, was of a lower temperature than the sea, and never could have fallen to that lower temperature unless it had reached it in some medium, or place, colder than the sea. The body could only have been placed in the sea very shortly before it was recovered, since sufficient time had not elapsed for the sea to raise it to its own temperature. Where, then, had de Quettville been drowned? The place was, of course, obvious the moment one asked where a man *could* be drowned in water much colder than the sea. The answer was, in a well of spring water some fifty feet deep, in which he was held in an upright position by the rope they threw back into the well when they drew him out again."

"Mère Trouteaud's well?" I cried. "And you knew that when we were sitting on it the other day?"

"Oh, it was obvious. They must have got him when he took his usual look round before locking up. Possibly that reserve tennis ball was thrown through the window to draw him outside. Once outside they used the sheet taken from Mère Trouteaud to throw over his head, and stifle any outcry. At the time we sat on the well I was not wondering how it was done but who did it."

"Yes," Carey said reminiscently, "the alibis were too good—both sets. Drury all the week in Sark, and Brisson from the Thursday till the Saturday in France, while it was manifestly impossible for this Coquard to do the thing single-handed."

This sat me up on the couch exasperated.

"Look here," I said, "if I have any rights in the matter, if I deserve any credit at all, will you explain just how you discovered who did it?"

"Ah," Le Marinel cried, "that is where our Chief Constable comes in." McNab nodding assent, looked over at me.

"You remember I left you last night to go and see Drury about his finger-prints on the tennis ball? Well, I put it to him that finger-prints cannot lie, and that somewhere or other, at some time or another, he must have handled that tennis ball. He denied it in a manner stamped with sincerity; and since he had told the proved truth about his Sark visit, I believed him. As delicately as possible I suggested the possibility that he might have touched the ball when in a certain condition. I may mention we were then drinking together, though not in the Perigord, bad blood having arisen between himself and Coquard over Brisson's daughter, each man supposing the other stood in his way. Besides, Drury's stock was down with Brisson on account of de Quettville's will.

"Still I got no reaction to my suggestion that he might have handled the ball after handling a glass or two. In despair I said suggestively, 'A gilt ball—round—yellow—like an orange. Suddenly a spark lit in his dull eyes. Before he spoke I knew something was coming. 'Ah,' he said, 'now I've got you! By Jove, yes, I was rather tight that night. It's mighty vague, though; it's like trying to remember an old dream. Let me see! I was crossing to Sark next day, and when Judy said she would not give me another drink, not even a lemon squash, I got over the counter to frighten her. That made her cry out, and run, and when she was away I saw a plate of lemons under the counter—made a grab at one just as Coquard got me by the neck.'"

Carey smiled.

"Talking about giving credit where credit is due," he said. "Notice that if Drury had not got drunk he would never have mistaken a gilded tennis ball for a lemon, and we should never have traced the ball through Drury to Coquard."

"But that wouldn't convict him of murder," I said,

sure there was more behind. "Don't tell me he bolted for that?"

Here was a matter for an avocat.

"No," Le Marinel admitted; "but it didn't stand alone. Coquard by this time knew we were at work on the well, for Brisson saw our men there yesterday afternoon and was aware we might at any moment discover there the handle of the knife which he tossed into it when running down the lane on the morning the body was found. He knew, too, that it could be identified as his property. And he knew that though de Quettville might have lowered himself into the well and so have drowned himself, he could not afterwards raise himself out of the well. And he also knew that we suspected him of being an escaped criminal from Cayenne, and that alone would make him fly to escape the Chief's clutches."

"But why did he go to Perigord?"

"To look for Brisson."

"But Brisson was not at Perigord."

"No fear! Brisson made straight for the boats at Saints' Bay as soon as he heard we had interviewed Coquard, for Brisson knew his Catulle, and had no doubt that Coquard, once cornered, would give him away."

"But," I protested, "that's like telling me Brisson is the murderer."

"Assisted by Coquard, yes."

"But Brisson was in France on the night of the murder. Did he somehow contrive to pass from France to Guernsey, and back on the Friday night?"

To my further amazement no one answered this question. And as I waited I saw how they looked at each other. Here then was the thing they were keeping from me. Then McNab spoke very quietly.

"Hillaire de Quettville was not murdered on the

Friday night. He was murdered on the Wednesday night, two days earlier."

"That is nonsense. I myself saw him on the Thursday, and he was certainly alive then."

"He certainly was not," McNab said.

I looked at Carey and Le Marinel in turn. On neither face was there any surprise. McNab's astounding assertion was accepted in silence, though both looked uncomfortable. But McNab looked unhappy and attempted to disguise it by an affected light tone.

"We've been talking about where the chief credit should go," he said. "I'm not sure that most of it does not belong to a little dog, a little dog I never saw. For when I was at a complete deadlock over that alibi of Brisson's it was the little dog's bark that gave me the necessary hint. On the Tuesday night, when the old woman went to see if it was true, what they told her, that the Neptune had been put up on a pillar in the garden, her little dog barked when he saw the Neptune. It was a bark that cost its life." McNab stopped as if taken by a sudden thought.

"There was a time when I wondered whether this was a murder of premeditation or whether it was more or less accidental. The torn sheet, for instance, might only have been taken to the garden to redeck the figure in the similitude of de Quettville again, to replace the shirt. But no! The evidence of scheming and contriving is too overwhelming; and part of it is the little dog's death. For the dog saw what his mistress in the obscurity, and with her old eyes, could not see—that it was a living man who knelt on the top of the pillar, a living man who must have been in terror when he heard the barking. The old woman, however, did not understand what the little dog was trying to tell her; and the danger for the watching man passed. What was he watching? Maybe more things than one, but

one thing I can tell you, and that is that from the top of the pillar you can see right into the study. Now you know the position of the well in the old woman's garden, nearer the gate than the cottage. Little risk of her hearing, but great risk from that alert little dog. So it died on Wednesday, the same day as de Quettville, but earlier, some time earlier. They wanted to be undisturbed while they were using the well."

Now all this would have been really interesting if it had not been for the fact that it could not be true.

"Look here," I cut in; "again I have to remind you that I saw de Quettville alive on Thursday."

Then out it came.

"Dunn," Le Marinel began, "do you remember on the Friday in the Rue Galette, when you met me outside my house?"

"Quite well," I replied, surprised at his solemn tone.

"You remember when you saw this man Coquard you said you thought you had seen him before?"

"Yes."

"So you had."

"Where and when?"

"In de Quettville's bed on the Thursday night."

All their eyes were on my face. I felt that. And they were quick enough to read what they saw there. It did not take long. Le Marinel was right. Some truths win conviction from us gradually; others blaze upon us as by a flash of lightning. And this was one of these. Le Marinel was right—Coquard it was.

McNab rose to come and sit down on the end of the couch.

"Don't blame yourself, Dunn," he said. "If it's any comfort to you, I'll admit that I would have been taken in myself. You had never seen de Quettville before. They counted on that, and had chosen a time when Dr. Wright was away. Mrs. Bichard did not enter the

room with you, and even if she had he could have carried it off, since she already believed him to be queer. But he didn't bargain on your being sent for. That must have been his second moment of terror. No wonder you found his heart going above the normal. It would be the false beard he was afraid of. His head was all right, since his hair was covered by the night-cap ; but that beard was only meant to take in the house-keeper and Miss Blampied, and these he could, and did, keep at a distance. He could not keep you at a distance. Still, you had only the light of a single candle, and he must have thought all was well till he saw you enter the wine shop on the Saturday night."

Here Carey intervened in a matter of fact voice, as if to take the talk away from anything that might reflect on me.

" I was greatly puzzled as to why Coquard should occupy the bed at all," he said. " It was to search the room for the will, I suppose, and obtain the freedom of the house at night."

" Probably," McNab asserted. " And also to create a suspicion of de Quettville's insanity by odd behaviour. A master stroke that, since even if they failed to unearth the will and destroy it, the same object would be achieved by establishing insanity." He turned to Carey. " Since your men haven't rung you up I suppose there's no news of Brisson ? "

" I doubt if we'll have further news of him," Carey said. " If he hoped to get picked up by a French trawler, the storm last night would shatter that hope before he got far."

He rose and stretched himself in a way that somehow suggested content.

" I'm very sorry about my failure to identify Coquard," I said to him. " All along I *knew* I'd seen him before, but I kept on trying to connect him with some incident

in my Paris days, and that put me on the wrong scent."

"You needn't blame yourself," he said, shaking hands. "Wait till you see that false beard to-morrow; it was no impromptu affair, I can tell you." He hesitated, and then looking at me said, "I envy you last night. We got him this morning and settled one last question that would have left us otherwise rather bothered. The woman's finger-prints, you know. They were not those of a woman at all, but Coquard's. Among his other attributes, he had the long, thin, prehensile fingers of the thief."

"Yes," Le Marinel said as he got up, "I, too, envy Dunn his chance last night; but we cannot grudge it him when we remember all the tricks Coquard played on him."

Here, still feeling sore with myself, I blundered out something rather ironical and bitter about having been more successful in taking life than in saving it. This brought up McNab.

"Man, you're just havering. Whose life did you want to save?" he cried in mock indignation. "Not de Quettville's; he was dead before ever you saw him. As for Coquard, I've a notion that when ye tossed that slimy devil over the precipice last night ye did more for human welfare than you've yet done with all your pills and poultices."

Le Marinel, his eyes twinkling, held out his hand.

"As to that," he said, "we on the island must also be grateful that Dr. Dunn's action saved the States of Guernsey the expense of a gallows."

"True!" McNab eagerly assented. "Both in its economic and its ethical aspects, Dunn's prompt action with Coquard was more than justified."

DEAD MAN'S WATCH

CONTENTS

PART I.—FOUND DROWNED

CHAP		PAGE
I.	POLICE !	9
II.	A CORPSE	13
III.	POLICE ON THE SPOT	24
IV.	QUESTION OF A BEARD	30
V.	WHO IS IT ?	37
VI.	A PENTECOSTAL HOPPER	49
VII.	TOO MANY NAMES	58
VIII.	A CORONER SITS ALONE	64
IX.	A PUZZLED POLICEMAN	71
X.	HUSH-MONGERING	75
XI.	THE SLEUTHS' COMPACT	85

PART II.—AMATEURS ON THE TRAIL

XII.	LETTERS AND SUSPECTS	97
XIII.	THE POLICE CONFER	114
XIV.	DIET AND DETECTION	120
XV.	MARINE VIEW	129
XVI.	THE KIND CHAMBERMAID	140
XVII.	THE DOCTOR	145
XVIII.	AN UNEXPECTED ARREST	156
XIX.	IMPASSE	164
XX.	CALL MR. WILSON	171

PART III.—THE SUPERINTENDENT

XXI.	NORTH SAWFORD IMPRESSIONS	179
XXII.	A NEW CLUE	192
XXIII.	A SUPERINTENDENT'S NOTE-BOOK	201
XXIV.	AT SANDS-ON-SEA	209
XXV.	THE WATCH AND THE REGISTRAR	217
XXVI.	EXORCISING A BOGEY	229
XXVII.	THE STORY OF A CRIME	238

PART I

FOUND DROWNED

CHAPTER I

POLICE !

THE village of Studleigh Pepperton lies on the main road from Exeter. At least, that is how the local guide puts it, though it would seem almost more correct to say that the main road lies on the village of Studleigh Pepperton, so broad, imposing and traffic-thronged is that main road, and so insignificant and retiring, by comparison, appear the small houses of Studleigh Pepperton and the little lanes, called by courtesy streets, which slip away from it down the hill on either side. For the main road here takes the crest of the ridge, and looks, almost, to have seen the ridge from afar, and with a snort of satisfaction resembling, presumably, the voice of a thousand Klaxons, to have laid itself calmly down, flattening beneath it the central portion of the old hamlet. Only at the very highest point does the village faintly assert its identity, where a roadlet of very second-class character, coming hesitantly up from the creek below, slides into the main road round the corner of a church, fifteenth-century and restored almost out of recognition, in front of which a shabby war memorial, its prouder elevation turned to face the "shopping centre," disconsolately informs stragglers from the creek that A. Juggins perished in the service of his country. At this point there is frequently to be seen a fine specimen of the Devon County Constabulary —not, indeed, directing the traffic, which is far more efficiently done by the A.A.'s enormous yellow sign and the retiring local one which looks down the creek road, and invitingly murmurs, "To Stone Only 2 Miles;"

but because, after all, he is a policeman and he lives in Studleigh Pepperton. And he has certainly a far more impressive facade than the war memorial.

But on this burning August afternoon there was no sweltering blue figure at the top of the hill; and this was an occurrence rare enough to cause a man who came up the main road in a two-seater to pause and look round him with some surprise as he alighted at the door of the post office, fifty yards or so below the church. He was a lean fellow of thirty or a year or two more, hatless, dressed in an open shirt and grey flannel trousers of unbelievable age and filth; and his rough, fair hair stood on end above an impressive beak of a nose whose message was belied by an amiably recessive chin, and a wide and slack though humorous mouth below. He looked up and down the pavement for a second or two; and then the wide mouth creased, and he gave a whistle of amusement.

Next door but one to the post office stood one of those forlorn confectioners, with three or four plates of dismal buns and a notice, DEVONSHIRE TEAS. CREAM SENT TO ANY PART OF THE WORLD, of the kind with which wayside villagers make optimistic bids to stay the speeding stream of cars. In it were two rickety tables with vases of paper flowers, at one of which a non-descript man was facing a DEVONSHIRE TEA. A fluffy-haired, sharp-nosed young lady, obviously city rather than country bred, was standing behind the counter, and in front of it, leaning ingratiatingly forward, a large blue back obscured the view of the chocolate packets.

"Sootham! Sootham!" sighed the motorist, half-aloud. "At your time of life—cream *and* buns—on duty! When you're needed to be enforcing the speed-limit, too," he added, as his ears caught the sound of a motor bicycle furiously ridden, and his long-sighted grey eyes

saw the source of it far away down the road to Stone. He approached the shop a little nearer and grinned derisively in through the plates of cakes, looking very like a minor medieval gargoyle. The girl saw him, and drew away from her large admirer with a self-conscious giggle.

"Oh, get on with you, Mr. Sootham, do!" she said. "There's that Sir Charles looking in at the window at you, and what'll he be saying to them at the station, I should like to know?"

The man at the table pricked up his ears, and hitched his chair suggestively. For he was a reporter new to the job, sent down to cover the flower show at Studleigh Chase, and anything that he could glean about local notabilities would make his task all the easier.

"Beg your pardon, miss," he said; "but Sir who did you say?"

"Sir Charles Wylie," the girl returned, without looking at him. "Now, give over there, Mr. Sootham. It won't do you no good, that you can see." She pushed aside the large red hand of the constable, who was endeavouring inarticulately to indicate that a thousand Sir Charles Wylies were nothing to him. At this moment, Sir Charles's face, which had been surveying the by-play with pleased malice, was withdrawn from the window, to the girl's obvious relief, and the conversation was continued in freer tones, the reporter seizing the opportunity to seek a little more information.

"Sir Charles Wylie, *Bart.*, is it?" he asked, hiding a note-book beneath the table; for he believed, as yet, that the public lived in terror of the Press.

The girl did not know, but "That'll be right. Bart. he is," the constable supplied. "Like his father was before him, and *he* was Sir Charles too."

"He lives just about a mile off here, down the Stone Road," the girl put in, anxious not to be left behind

in the supply of information. " It's called Gracehouses, the place is, and it's just beyond Studleigh Chase, where they're having the big flower show."

" I suppose he'll be going along there, then ? " the reporter ventured, feeling for a paragraph opening. The constable gave a grunt, and the girl an amused squeal.

" Not him, you betcher life ! He's not one to go with the gentry all in their best clothes, neither. He's more likely to be hanging about the pubs, waiting for them to open. That's the sort of gentry *he* is ! Mr. Sootham's always having to go and fetch him out, dead drunk."

" Now then, that's not right," Mr. Sootham protested. " It wasn't only the once, and Sir Charles wasn't dead drunk at that—not by a long way."

" Well, I like that ! " the girl said indignantly. " When you've told me yourself again and again, how you were called up to go to the Golden Lamb, and—goodness gracious, whatever's that ? "

From the hot street a voice was shouting, hoarse and though not very loud, yet with a peculiar note of urgency. And it seemed to be shouting something very like " Police ! " An instant later, the door of the shop opened, and the gargoyle reappeared in the opening.

" Sootham ! " it said. " Duty calling, Sootham ! "

Mr. Sootham lurched upright, settled his helmet, and with a face only slightly redder than before, lumbered towards the door, the little reporter sidling after him. " Police ! " repeated the voice quite clearly through the open doorway.

CHAPTER II

A CORPSE

SIR CHARLES WYLIE, who had driven into the village for no more sinister purpose than to buy stamps, removed his head from the window of the tea shop, but did not immediately seek the post office. He stood, instead, staring down the hill in the direction of Stone. "That chap's in a damned hurry," he said to himself.

It was a motor bicycle with an empty side-car that came hurtling along the by-road at a good sixty miles an hour—and it was as well, Sir Charles reflected automatically, that the side-car was empty, for any passenger must have been shaken nearly to pieces at that speed on that surface. Even when it came to the hill it scarcely seemed to slacken at all, but roared and bumped its way like a maniac up to the church and out into the main road, which luckily held no traffic at the moment of its arrival. Then its rider, a long pale-faced boy in flannel trousers and a cheap blazer, checked his speed, craned his neck from side to side as if urgently seeking something, and quite unexpectedly let out that hoarse cry of "Police!"

"Hallo! hallo!" said Wylie to himself; and put out a signalling hand, the while he looked in at the door of the shop, and delivered his summons to Police-Constable Sootham. When he turned back, the motor cycle was stopping, with a violent grinding of brakes, just by his own car; and its owner, with a repetition of his cry, fell rather than sprang from the saddle. Wylie, whose grey eyes were perceptive enough when he was interested, stepped forward with a ready arm in case

the boy were about to faint. But he did not; he only staggered slightly, and stood staring at the other with a dazed expression.

"City clerk" was written all over him—in the cut of his clothes and hair, in his cheap, bright blazer and in the whiteness of the skin that showed beneath his shirt. He was a lanky, anæmic-looking youth, not more than eighteen or nineteen at the most, with a thin face, a long pointed nose, slender shoulders, and the drooping lip of a child or a dog that has not been too kindly treated. But his blue eyes, bewildered though they were, surveyed Wylie straight enough, and seemed to hold more character than the rest of his somewhat ordinary person.

"Where's the police . . ." he began in a husky voice; and then, seeing the blue uniform emerging from the door, cried, "Oh!" and pushed Wylie to one side.

"What's this about?" Mr. Sootham began slowly.

"My uncle's drowned. I want the police," the boy said abruptly.

"Drowned? Then you'd better get a doctor," Wylie interrupted. "Don't be in such a hurry. Drowned men don't die at once. Look here—where's the nearest, Sootham? Dr. Grocer, isn't it? He lives just down there—second on the right. Half a second; I'll show you." He laid a hand on the boy's sleeve, but the boy shied and jerked his arm away.

"No. He's dead."

"Don't be a fool, man; you can't tell. Get a doctor to him quick; that's the thing to do. Where is he?"

"Down there." He pointed vaguely down the road. "But—but——" He stared blankly at Wylie and the constable. "He's dead, I tell you. I mean"—with an obvious effort—"he's *been* dead—a long time. I've—I've just found him."

"Whew!" Wylie stepped back a pace in surprise,

but the constable stepped forward. This, he felt, was where he came on the scene.

"What's that you say?" he said, quite sharply for him.

"I s-said," said the boy, stuttering a little, "I've just found my uncle drowned in that creek down there." The constable glanced at Wylie, whose eyebrows had gone up in surprise. "And—and he's been there a l-long time. I want the police."

"Name?" said Sootham, who had produced a large official note-book, and was turning over the leaves.

"Bittaford. Percy Bittaford."

"Your name's that? Or your uncle's?"

"My uncle's. My name's Ronald Bittaford. But I want you to *come*! Why don't you come now?" The boy's voice had suddenly sharpened, and there was a frightened appeal in his eyes.

Wylie came to his rescue. "Yes, Sootham, he's right. You don't want to stand there fiddling with a note-book as if you were a speed cop. If Mr. Bittaford's right, your business is to get down there at once, and see what's been happening. Look here"—he glanced at the diminutive side-car and then at the constable's massive figure—"you'd better jump in and I'll run you down. Mr. Bittaford will show us the way. If it's on my property, you know," he added, "I'd like to see what's been happening."

"On your property?" Ronald Bittaford muttered in a bewildered way.

"Depends which side of the creek it is," Wylie told him. "The ground this side is mine. Look here, are you all right to ride down again and show us?" He looked at the boy's white face. "I'm sure it's a pretty bad shock for you. If you're feeling a bit groggy, what about——?" He dived a hand under a flap of the car and produced a flask; but young Bittaford signed it

back with an expression of revulsion. "I'm all right," he said. "I'll show you where;" and laid hold of his motor bicycle.

"Come on, Sootham, in with you. Hurry up," said Wylie. "And don't go too fast," he added to Bittaford, but the motor cycle was well away before the slow-moving constable had got himself into the car. As it started, the little newspaper man, after a quick look up and down the road, went off at a brisk trot after it. This was far more promising than flower shows. He wished he had dared to ask for a lift.

. . . . . .

"Bit of an excitement for you, Sootham, eh?" Wylie said, as they slipped down the hill. "If that lad's right. Damn, we ought to have brought Grocer down with us—to see what's happened to the fellow, anyhow. Just like me to forget. Never mind, we'll pop round to Vincent's place and get a doctor. Sure to be some sawboneses about goggling at his gladioli. I'll burst in on them and say, 'Corpse on Sir Isaac's—beg pardon, Sir Julius's—estate—rather stale corpse; we think the dust-cart can't have called there lately,' and think of all their faces, eh?"

"'Tisn't sure it's on Sir Julius's ground, yet, sir," Sootham said accurately.

"No, damn it! Pretty certain to be on mine—just the sort of thing somebody would go and dump on me. Bet you anything you like it was old Vincent himself. Still, we can but hope, and, anyway, it's a corpse, and that may be a bit of a leg-up for you, old son. But, look here, Sootham, are you sure you feel up to it? Corpses, you know—nasty things, and I don't believe you've seen as much as a dead camel in all your born days. And it wouldn't do for you to go turning queer and letting the Force down, you know. Sure you're perfectly fit? For, if you've any doubts, you know

you've only to say the word——" His hand went suggestively to the pocket with the flap.

"Now, then, Sir Charles, you shouldn't talk that way," Sootham said. "Tempting me to take drink on duty." Nevertheless, his eyes were wistfully following the direction of the hand—not that he was afraid of corpses, but it was a very hot afternoon.

"I'm not tempting you, my good man," Wylie retorted impatiently. "I'm tempting myself; but devil a one of you will give me an excuse to cool my throat. Well, it's your last chance, and don't you repent when you see me swilling it down all alone. Oh! Damn! I told you it *would* be on my ground!"

Ahead of them, the motor cycle had stopped by a gate leading into a field, from which a little path ran to the belt of trees that fringed the creek. Up this path was coming, slowly, a girl in a white jumper, with a scarlet beret pushed well back on her head, at whom young Bittaford was making pantomimic gestures from the road. The two-seater drew up just as she reached the gate.

"Dolly! What've you been doing?" Bittaford cried. "You've said you'd stop here!"

"I've not been doing anything," Dolly replied. "Just had a look. But I'm not looking now, anyway." She swung a little on the gate, with a nonchalant air; but Wylie, looking quickly at her face, thought that it was paler than was natural, and that her natural voice must be perky rather than subdued.

"You all right?" he asked quickly.

"Ow, yes, that's all right," she answered. "And 'tisn't *my* uncle, anyway. But——" She threw a quick glance at the boy. "You get along down there, quick, won't you?" Wylie nodded, and swung off rapidly down the path, Bittaford following silently, and Sootham with loud puffings. "Down there," said Bittaford as

they reached the trees. "Just by the edge of the water."

"Whew!" said Wylie softly, when they found him. "Yes, he's dead, all right."

The body lay sprawled on its back on the mud at the edge of the creek, where it had obviously been left by the retreating tide. As obviously, it had not got into the water either that day or the day before. Wylie was no doctor, nor very much acquainted with death; but he was quite certain that that puffy face, those stained, rumpled and weed-covered clothes, were not the result of a mere half-dozen hours in the water. For the rest, the body might well enough be the body of Ronald Bittaford's uncle, though it bore no very close physical resemblance to him, for it was certainly a body belonging to the clerk or small tradesman class. Of middle height or slightly under, it was dressed in a pepper-and-salt suit which had once been neat, with shirt and tie in keeping; and the hat, had the hat survived, would almost certainly have been a bowler. It had thin greying hair which had fallen away to show the bald patch on top, a clean-shaven face curiously brown about the upper part of the cheeks, and a mouth—a horrid, nerve-shattering mouth which sagged open to reveal pale empty gums. And it was dead—very dead. It was no wonder, Wylie thought, that young Bittaford had told his girl—if she was his girl—not to go down to the creek, nor any wonder that she had come back from her private view looking greenish. He felt a trifle sick himself.

"You're pretty sure," he asked the nephew at last, "that—that he *is* your uncle—Percy, was it?"

"Yes!" Ronald Bittaford said, and looked at Wylie with sudden truculence. "Of course it is! Do you think I don't know—who's my uncle?"

"Oh, all right. Keep your hair on. If you say he's

your uncle, I suppose you know best. But what's he doing in my creek? How did he come to fall in?"

"I don't know. I didn't know he was here. I—I don't know what he's been doing," the boy said, swallowing.

"You hadn't seen him?"

"I used to live with him—but it's more than a year ago."

"Oh! Then you just—happened to find him—like this?" Wylie's eyes were very sympathetic.

"Yes. I—we were just going to have tea here—I and my friend, Miss Daniells." He jerked his head in the direction of the gate. "We—we thought it would be a nice place. We came on my bike. And we stopped here, and I went down ahead. And I saw him——" He stopped short, with a groan which sounded like sheer physical pain.

"Yes. I see. Well, something's got to be done about it. Sootham," said Wylie, turning to the constable, who had gone on his knees beside the body and was laboriously writing in his note-book, "stop that damn fiddling about. You've got to get hold of an inspector, haven't you, or something like that? And a doctor—who's the police doctor? Grainger, isn't it? I'm sure it was Grainger gave me the once-over. He's a sort of a damn snob, isn't he? Bound to be over with that crowd at Vincent's place. You pop over and get him, there's a good chap. I'll stay here."

"I don't think," the constable said heavily, "as I ought to leave the—the gentleman. P'r'aps you wouldn't mind going over yourself, Sir Charles, like you said, and just letting them know——"

"Um-m." It was fairly obvious that Sir Charles did mind. In some way, the prospect of joyfully informing Sir Julius Vincent's guests that there was a stale corpse in the neighbourhood had unaccountably lost its savour. Besides, the body had turned out not to be on Sir

Julius's ground after all and half the joke was destroyed. Still, somebody had to go; and he was reluctantly moving up towards the gate, when he noticed a smallish man, who had apparently been having a chat with Miss Dolly Daniells, passing through it. "Hi!" he said. "What are you doing there?"

"Beg pardon," said the small man, as he hurried nervously forward. "But I heard something—this young lady said—about there being a naccident. Thought I might be a bit of use, p'r'aps."

"Oh! Well, you can be, then. Here . . . where the deuce? Damn, I don't believe I've got a shred of paper on me!" Wylie hunted in the pockets of his tweed coat.

"I've got some here, if that's any use," said the small man, producing a large, fresh note-pad. "*And* a pen."

"Thanks." Wylie had taken the pad and was scribbling rapidly. "Here, you cut along to Sir Julius Vincent's place—that's the big drive on the left there—and say you've a note for Dr. Grainger, and it's dead urgent. I haven't a card, but you say it's from me—Sir Charles Wylie—and he's got to stir his stumps for once in his life. Sure you don't mind?"

"Certainly not, Sir Charles. I'll be delighted," said the reporter with great truthfulness. But he wouldn't give himself away, not he, or he'd be turned off in a brace of shakes. Lucky the Bart. didn't know a reporter's note-pad when he saw one. "Case of drowning, is it?" he ventured. "Nothing serious, I 'ope?"

"Good heavens, man, *I* don't know! Chap's dead enough, if that's what you mean. But I don't know anything else; I'm not one of your sleuths. Though it's queer——" He broke off. "But Grainger doesn't want to know that; he'll see fast enough when he comes. Buzz off now, there's a good chap. And if you can't get Grainger there, get 'em to let you ring up the

police station and tell 'em to hurry along here at once. In any case, see that the police know at once. See ? "

The reporter trotted excitedly off, and Wylie turned back to look at the figures in the trees. The dead man was hardly visible. All he could see was one of his boots sticking up, grotesquely, where a shaft of sunlight caught it. Police Constable Sootham was on his knees in the mud by him, looking like a small saurian. " Damn fool, what use does he think it's likely to be, crawling around like that ? " Wylie thought. " Does he suppose the chap left his footprints under the tideway ? " Ronald Bittaford stood a little way back, perfectly rigid and whiter than ever. " Looks as if he'd be sick in a minute, poor kid," Wylie murmured to himself ; and then, moved by a sudden impulse, strolled up to where the girl was still leaning upon the gate. As he approached she raised her head and looked at him. She was a prettyish child, of the bright city cock-sparrow type, and her colour had come back to some extent, though the brown eyes she turned on him looked puzzled and worried.

" He's dead, isn't he ? " she asked sharply.

" Oh, yes. Been dead for some time. Horrid for you," Wylie said sympathetically, " if you're not used to it."

" It isn't that ! I don't mind, really. But it's—I mean, Mr. Bittaford does," she ended, having obviously changed her mind in the middle of the sentence. " I mean, it's his uncle, isn't it ? "

" I suppose so," Wylie agreed. " D'you know anything about it—how it happened ? "

" Not a thing ! Honest, straight I don't know. And, Mr Bittaford doesn't either. I mean, it stands to reason he doesn't, because he's not seen his uncle this last year and a half, anyway. They had a bit of a dust-up, you see, and Ron said he wasn't going back there any more, not to be talked at ; so he just went off to London to

get a job, and lived in rooms. And that's how I came to know him, living in the same house, we were, and he didn't have any uncles nor any sort of relations coming to see him. And he didn't write because he never writes letters. So it stands to reason he couldn't have known he was going to be about here, doesn't it ? "

" Seems so," Wylie said cautiously. " Your boy friend, is he ? " She seemed to find some relief in talking, and she might as well have something to talk about.

" Well, sort of." She looked up frankly. " I mean, we're just trying it out for a bit—seeing how we like each other without giving everybody else the go-by. I mean, that's how we come to be off on a holiday down these ways, got on to Lyme Regis last night, and Ron was going to show me round these parts, 'cos he used to stay there when he was a kid. And we would go and run into a thing like this, just when we haven't been gone a week. Now he'll be all of a heap for ages—might just as well pack up and hop it at once ! "

" He looks as if it would upset him," Wylie said ; and the girl nodded vigorously.

" He's funny that way, anything goes wrong and he's all of a shake. If you ask me, it's the last thing I'd ever seen myself doing, taking up with a soft chap like that. But the way he talks—you know, there's something about him gets me, every time—I can't do with it and that's a fact." She looked down to the trees with anxiety in her eyes. " Just like that old uncle of his to get himself drowned right under his nose and spoil his holiday—spiteful old geezer ! " She caught Wylie's amused glance, and blushed rather defiantly. " Well, I know it is awful of me, talking like this ; but how'm I going to pretend to be sorry for him, when I didn't ever see him in my life, and never heard anything good of him, neither ? You wouldn't yourself, not if it was you."

"I assure you, my dear Miss Daniells," Wylie said earnestly, "if all my relatives lay drowned at my feet this instant, I shouldn't turn a hair."

"Oh, that's talk," the girl said contemptuously. At least she was not shy of him, and he rather liked her, for all her Cockney accent. "You wait—it's a different thing when one of them's ackshally there. But what's eating me is——"

"Yes, what is it? What did you notice?" Wylie asked eagerly, as she stopped. But he never got his answer, for even as she began to speak she broke it off with an "Oo! Whatever's that?" And Wylie, looking up, saw a long Daimler, with two men in it, come sliding down the road.

"That's Grainger, the police doctor," he said. "And, my hat! that's Wyndham, the chief constable, with him. Now the band's going to play."

"Nice little tin Lizzie he's got, I don't think," said the girl. "Must pay being a whatever-is-it."

"Not his. Second-best outfit of a Yid who lives next door to me, and calls himself Julius Vincent," Wylie rapidly informed her. "Well, Grainger, you haven't been as long as you might. Afternoon, colonel. He's down here."

"What have you been up to now, Charles?" the chief constable inquired, looking none too pleased at the encounter.

"I? Nothing at all. 'Sno use you setting your sleuths on the nearest poor devil, just because he happens to be the nearest. That's what all the chief constables do in the stories, and the great private detective comes and blows them sky high—whoop!" said Wylie, making a face. "Come on down and get on with it." Colonel Wyndham pushed past without another word.

Wylie gave a whistle, and followed more slowly.

CHAPTER III

POLICE ON THE SPOT

"YES, he's dead right enough. Been in the water two or three days at least, and I should say longer," the police doctor said, looking distastefully at the corpse and at Sootham's uniform, which was grey to the knees from his researches in the mud.

"Drowned?" inquired the chief constable, a laconic, worried-looking man who suggested a good company commander unwisely promoted to the orderly room.

"Looks like it. But it's no use my touching him here," said the doctor, with an expression which seemed to say that it was his elegant lavender trousers rather than any medical consideration which prevented an examination on the spot. "I suppose your fellows'll be along directly."

"I told them to hurry," the chief constable said in a tone which suggested that this was sure to make them delay. "They oughtn't to be above five minutes. Meanwhile, this is your land, isn't it, Charles?"

"It is. But I'm not responsible for what's found on it—nor even for finding it," Wylie said.

"This gen'l'man found it, sir," the constable intervened. "Name of Bittaford—same like the other gentleman's." He indicated in pantomime the corpse and its discoverer, who was still standing by his tree, gazing blankly into the air.

"Oh! A relation!" The chief constable, who had not grasped the fact before, hastily assumed a more humane expression, and went over to Ronald's side; while the little reporter, with the appearance of having

run all the way from Sir Julius Vincent's house, reappeared at the top of the path.

"Look here, my boy," said Colonel Wyndham, with a sort of kindly ferocity, "this—horrid thing for you, I know, but we've got to find out about it. This gentleman's a relation of yours?"

"My uncle. Percy Bittaford. My name's Ronald Bittaford." Ronald was speaking in a flat, dead tone, almost as though he were repeating a lesson by rote. "I don't know anything about it. I haven't had anything to do with my uncle since January last year, and I only came to this place this afternoon. I came from Lyme Regis with that lady over there, and we stopped here to have tea, and when I came down to the creek I saw him lying there on the edge. I don't know why he should be there; I don't know anything about it at all!"

"Not a resident hereabouts, then?" asked Colonel Wyndham, looking rather curiously into the boy's face.

"No. He lives at 17 Jubilee Street, Yeovil. He's got a garage there," the boy said. "I used to live there too—till I went away."

"Married?"

"Yes."

"Have to let his wife know," Wyndham muttered to himself. And then, "Who are you, please? And what the dickens are you still hanging about for?" He had just caught sight of the small reporter.

"I thought—there was a naccident—I might be of some assistance. My name's Hanson," the reporter said.

"Well, I'm deeply obliged to you, Mr. Hanson," Colonel Wyndham said with heavy sarcasm; "but I should have thought you'd have grasped by now that you couldn't be. This is a police case, and we don't want any outsiders hanging around. Clear out now."

"I—couldn't I take a message, p'r'aps—or get anything you want?" Mr. Hanson murmured, hovering

round and trying to get a glimpse of the corpse, which was concealed by Sootham and the doctor.

"Clear out, I said!" the chief constable roared with sudden rage. "Do you suppose we want nosey little ghouls hanging about while we do our work? And you're trespassing, anyway; this is private property. Clear right out now, and don't let me catch you hanging about again within a mile of the place!"

"Savage fellow you are, Wyndham," Sir Charles said, as Mr. Hanson obediently cleared, outwardly depressed, but inwardly bubbling with joy. The old military fool hadn't even told him to keep his mouth shut. Heaven hope this one-horse place had a post office with a telephone. "I'd never dare to order a chap off my land in such a parade bellow."

The chief constable looked for the moment as though he would like to order the owner of the land off it as well; but thought better of it, and turned back to Ronald.

"You say you're only down here on a visit," he said. "Where are you staying?"

"Nowhere," said Ronald. "I stayed in rooms at Lyme Regis yesterday, and I was going to stay somewhere by Dartmoor to-night."

"And you don't know—you can't imagine how your uncle could have come to be drowned here?"

"No."

"Was he a sailor—fond of boating, for example?"

"No."

"Nor had—anything on his mind, that you know of? Any worries?"

"I don't know," said Ronald "He didn't write to me."

"Um-m." The chief constable regarded him with perplexity, and bit his moustache. But he was saved for the moment by the appearance of a police ambulance

in the road, from which three figures detached themselves and came down the path. Two were carrying a stretcher, while the third walked in lofty distinction beside it.

"Oh, there you are, Cavanagh," the chief constable said with relief. "Dr. Grainger wants you to get the body along to the mortuary as quickly as you can, and he'll examine it there. So go ahead, will you? You needn't mind messing up the ground; the tide's been all over hereabouts within the last couple of hours."

"Afternoon, Cavanagh," said Wylie.

"Very good, sir. Good-afternoon, Sir Charles." The inspector, a large rubicund man with a twinkle, grinned amiably at the baronet. He seemed to lack the prejudice of the chief constable. "Good-afternoon, doctor. We'll be right along—ready as soon as you are. Now, then, you fellows." His two assistants went efficiently to work, and soon had the body of Mr. Percy Bittaford decently composed on the stretcher. "Can we give you a lift, Dr. Grainger?" asked the inspector, preparing to follow them.

"I'll run you along, Grainger," said Wyndham, correctly interpreting the doctor's yearning glances, "in a minute or two. You get on, Cavanagh; I'll be there directly. Now then, Mr. Bittaford." He turned to Ronald, "I'll not be needing you for a bit; but I want to know where I can get at you. Where are you staying?"

"I'm not staying anywhere," Ronald said, without moving. "I came from Lyme Regis this morning, g-going to Dartmoor."

"Well, I'm sorry, but you can't go to Dartmoor. You'll have to stay here for a bit. Better put up at the —at the——"

"Golden Lamb," Wylie put in. "I'll show you. That'll be all right, Wyndham; leave it to me." The

chief constable favoured him with a suspicious stare, but eventually moved off, with an, " Oh, all right. I dare say that's as good as anywhere. I'll see you later, then. Coming, Grainger ? " Wylie and Ronald Bittaford were left alone, with only the trampled mud of the creek to record the events of the past half-hour.

" Bittaford," Wylie called softly, as the other did not move from his stance by the tree. " Bittaford ! " There was still no reply ; and after a second or two he went up and took him gently by the arm. " Look here, old chap, it's a beastly business, I know ; but it's got to be gone through. Wyndham's manners are foul, but his bark's much worse than his bite ; I know him. And Cavanagh's quite a decent chap. Come along now, and let's find some tea somewhere, and you'll feel more like facing it. Come on. Bittaford ! " more urgently. " Wake up, man, you can't stop here."

Ronald turned on him a face that was working curiously, and looked from him to the mud and back again. " Wha—what's he—where ? " he stuttered ; and then, freeing his arm from Wylie's grasp, he stumbled a yard or two away, and was suddenly and violently sick. Wylie, turning considerately aside until the paroxysm should have passed, saw Miss Dolly Daniells coming down the path towards them, and went to meet her.

She had evidently taken in the situation at a glance. " Sick ? " she asked, with an elaborately casual air. Wylie nodded. " Anything always takes him that way. He'll be all right in a minute. But "—looking at him in half-appeal—" what are we going to do ? Ron and me, I mean."

" First," said Wylie, " you're coming up in my car, now. We'll leave the bike in the field ; you can get it any time you want. Then we're going to the Golden Lamb, and we're going to tell it to find you some decent

moors, and you're going to have a drink or some tea, whichever you feel like——"

"Tea, please," said the girl.

"Tea it is. Then we can talk things over, and see what there is to be said, if anything. You go, there's a good girl, and tell your young man to come along; I fancy he's getting all right now."

"Thanks." She went to Ronald, who had slipped to the ground, and was sitting huddled together, rocking himself to and fro with a movement which might have been nausea or sheer fright, and putting an arm round his shoulders began to murmur something in his ear. After a minute or so she produced a handkerchief and wiped his forehead and kissed him; and directly afterwards he rose to his feet, and came towards Wylie, walking shakily, it is true, but looking altogether more normal.

"All right now," Dolly observed cheerfully. "Going to be a good boy and have some tea."

"I—I'm sorry——" Ronald was beginning, but Wylie cut him short.

"No apologies needed, dear boy. Perfectly natural under the circumstances. And it's damned hot, anyhow. Come along, shove your bus in the hedge, and I'll run you up—though you'll have to tuck yourself in the dickey, I'm sorry to say. Come along, Miss Daniells, you get in first."

In a minute or two they were safely packed in, and driving up the hill.

"You see what I told you," Miss Daniells said in a low voice. She had an odd feeling of having known this untidy toff with the boko all her life. "All to pieces in a moment. *I* dunno what I'll do with him, when he goes like this all of a sudden."

"Oh, I shouldn't worry," said Wylie encouragingly. "Must have been a pretty fierce shock, you know, to

come on your uncle suddenly, like that. Drowned people aren't pleasant to look at, at the best of times."

"I should say he wasn't!" The girl gave a little shudder. "But, I say, Mister——?"

"Wylie's my name. Sir Charles Wylie, in fact. Sorry," said the owner of it, but he could have spared his apologies.

"... Sir Charles, I say, did you see anything funny about his face? Not that he'd been drowned, I mean."

"About his chin, you mean. You're a bit of a bright kid, you know," said Wylie. "Wait till we get in. Here's the pub. Get out, and we'll talk to them." And after decanting his passengers, he surreptitiously opened the flap pocket, and took a long swill at its contents, before following them into the Golden Lamb's dingy entrance hall.

CHAPTER IV

QUESTION OF A BEARD

THE Golden Lamb did not appear to be pining for two extra visitors. Nor was it as impressed by the introduction of one of the chief landowners of the neighbourhood as it ought to have been. In fact, the fat and blowsy landlord (if a man can be blowsy) seemed rather to think it was all a poor joke of Wylie's, and to be inclined to throw the party then and there out into the highway Eventually, Miss Dolly Daniells had to come to the rescue, and rapidly established a relationship with him of which tea—and tea with a proper taste to it, too—and a bit of fish-paste and an egg or so was a very mild expression.

"You don't need any looking after, I can see that,"

said Wylie in wry appreciation, as they sat down to the feast. "No, for God's sake! Milk in that, quarts of milk. And let me send for a bucket of water. *You* won't be put off with what you don't want."

"Why should I?" Dolly answered, opening her eyes. "You ought to see my sister Liza—*and* my mother—if you want to know what you get by being too polite to ask. 'Tisn't any use opening your mouth and waiting to see what they put in it—not if you're us, I mean. Course, it's different if you're you." The last remark was made entirely without rancour.

"I daresay it is," Wylie agreed. "However, we're here for business, partly, and not for absorbing vile Indian compounds. Tell me now, what you saw—what you were going to tell me about in the car." The girl hesitated, surprisingly, opening her mouth and shutting it again, and then looking round nervously.

"I—I don't know. You see, it mightn't of been anything—only it looked a bit queer, see what I mean? But I don't know——"

"What don't you know? Come on, what's biting you?" Wylie said; but she still hesitated.

"Go on, can't you?" said Ronald suddenly. He had not spoken before, being engaged in absorbing eggs. But now he spoke with entirely unexpected ferocity. "Go on, say what you mean—if you mean anything."

"All right, you needn't bite my head off! Where's your manners—sulky?" Dolly said. "Well"—to Wylie—"it was only his chin——"

"*What* about his chin? Go on," said Wylie. "I think I saw it too—only I want you to say it, before *I* say."

"Well, wasn't it very white? Going by the rest of his face, I mean."

"It was And what then?"

"Well, and it had little bits of hairs sticking up.

Not how you'd have them, shaving ordinarily—not if you were dark like him, I mean."

Wylie laughed as her eyes went involuntarily to his own distinctly ill-shaven chin.

"Nothing else?"

"Not that I noticed. Why, was there——"

"Well, those cuts on his lip and his cheek. . . . But I dare say they're of no importance," Wylie checked himself. "Anyhow, let's be detectives for a bit. What conclusion do we draw from these observations, Watson?"

"That's an easy one, Mister Sherlock," said the girl. "He'd a beard, of course. And he'd had it shaved off just before he—before he got drowned."

"Not professionally shaved, either," Wylie supplemented. "No professional barber would dare to make such a mess as that of a chap's face. In fact, I wonder——" He paused, and seemed to sink into a deep study, from wnich he emerged to shoot a question at Ronald. "Bittaford, when you were living with your Uncle Percy, had he got a beard?"

"No, of course he hadn't," said Ronald, as though uncles were soil upon which beards would not grow.

"Then, if this body had a beard, it isn't your uncle's."

"It is," said Ronald, looking mulish.

"I mean, not your uncle, but somebody who looked like him—but who had a beard. Isn't that so, Miss Daniells?" The girl nodded, but young Bittaford only scowled.

"It *is* uncle," he said. "D'you suppose I don't know him?"

"Oh, hang it, don't be so cross! I mean—upon your own showing. . . . How long is it since you left his place?"

"January—I mean January last year. That's all. It *is* him—only I wish you'd stop talking about it!"

"Used to live there, didn't you?" said Wylie, ignoring the last appeal. "What were you doing there?"

"Book-keeper."

"But you left the job. Why?"

Ronald's expression said, "What does it matter why?" But he answered: "Don't know. Didn't like it. People always bothering about and wanting to know what you're doing. Couldn't stick it."

"You liked your auntie, you said," Dolly put in.

"Oh, she's all right. She leaves a fellow alone. But *he*—he was always fussing and messing about. And then his partner—always preaching and praying at you."

"Who was he?" said Wylie, pricking up his ears. He had a temperamental objection to religious persons, and was already prepared to view Mr. Bittaford's partner with grave suspicion.

"Dawes, his name is. Elisha Dawes."

"Sounds like a pillar of the local Ebenezer."

"So he is," said Ronald, while Dolly stared at the unfamiliar word. "Only it's the Pentecostal Hoppers."

"The *what* sort of hoppers?"

"Pentecostal. They're the International Bible something-or-other, really; but that's what they're called. When the Spirit moves them, they hop—all at once. Dawes is an elder; he preaches for them."

"Hopping all the time?" Wylie inquired with interest.

"I don't know," said Ronald, without any. "I never heard him. They were always going on at me to go, but I wouldn't."

"They? Was Percy a Hopper too, then? And your aunt—what was her name, by the way?"

"Caroline. She's a Hopper. She likes it. And Percy used to go along sometimes. But I don't see——"

"What on earth it's got to do with me, or what we were talking about. You're right," said Wylie; "it hasn't anything. It's just my inquiring mind. So I take it you had a row with your uncle and the estimable Mr. Dawes, as a result of which you cleared out?"

"I didn't have any row," said Ronald. "I just cleared out."

"Without their minding?"

"They didn't know. They'd only have bothered."

"You went off without any warning?"

"Yes."

"Didn't they come after you?"

"They couldn't. They didn't know where to come."

"Do you mean," said Wylie, looking at him in surprise, "that you popped off without a word or an address, and that they don't know where you are now?"

"I don't suppose so," said Ronald, helping himself to fish-paste. "Or they'd have turned up before now."

"Whew!" Wylie gave a whistle, while Dolly met his eyes with a glance of pride which said, as plainly as possible, "There! he isn't such a softy as he sounds, is he?"

"But," said Wylie, returning to his former point, "you're still absolutely certain that the body you found in my creek belongs to your Uncle Percy?"

"Of course it is. Why do you keep on asking?"

"Because we're pretty certain, Miss Daniells and I, that that body had a beard."

"Well, he could have grown one, couldn't he? Even though he didn't like them," Ronald said, and added irrelevantly, "Dawes has got a beard."

"Yes," said Wylie; "but the beard had been shaved off."

"S'pose he got tired of it," the boy said indifferently. He had finished his tea, and was leaning back, looking

a trifle less wretched than he had looked down by the creek. But the subject of the body found in it was clearly distasteful to him.

"Shaved," Wylie persisted, "in a hurry and not particularly well. What's the meaning of that?"

"I suppose," said Dolly, wrinkling her brows in perplexity, "that he must of wanted to disguise himself, sort of, so's he wouldn't be recognised."

"Yes. That—or——" Wylie mused.

"But he was," Dolly said. "Ron recognised him."

"Ron wasn't expected to be there—by the creek."

"Well, nor was Uncle Percy," Dolly retorted. "You don't suppose he'd go and disguise himself just so as to tumble into the water, do you? P'r'aps he'd done something and was cutting his hook?" she suggested with more excitement.

"Rot," said Ronald. "Oh, do shut it!" he added; but nobody regarded him.

"It isn't much of a disguise, anyway," Wylie admitted, "to cut off a beard that can only have been there for a few months—and to cut it off so badly that nobody'll be able to help noticing. I don't think that answer will quite wash—in fact, I'm not sure that there *is* an answer. But it looks funny, anyway. Look here"—to Dolly—"I think, if you're as sure of what you saw as I am, what I'd better do is to run along to the police station and have a word with them. Some of these local bobbies are such mutts, it's ten to one against their spotting a thing like that. And Grainger very likely won't even have soiled his lily-white hands with the poor fellow. It's six o'clock now," he continued, with a glance at the clock; "I'll just get a drink and slip along right away. You can fetch up that bus of yours"—to Ronald—"and I'll be back here some time this evening, if there's anything to report. And you might be thinking whether there's any possible reason, that you know of,

for your Uncle Percy walking into a creek—or being pushed there, for that matter."

He went out of the room, leaving Dolly's eyes wide with surprise as she took in the implication of his last words. A second or two later he returned to say, "I say, you'll be all right here, won't you? Because I'm afraid you'll have to stop for a bit, till the inquest's over, anyway, and you might as well be comfortable. If old Jackson doesn't do you nicely, push his face in, and tell him I'll take his licence away at the next Sessions. So long."

Dolly nodded, and smiled up at him, but she was apparently in the middle of some dispute with her fiancé, who was sitting with his elbows on the table and his hands pressing his forehead, muttering, "I won't —I can't. If you want it, go and get it yourself."

"That's a bit of a queer bird," Wylie reflected as he made his way to the bar. "Can't make out quite what's in his mind. The girl seems sane enough, though."

CHAPTER V

WHO IS IT?

IT was not, as a matter of fact, until some hours later that a large and rather amused-looking policeman opened the door of a private room at the North Sawford Police Station, and announced, "Sir Charles Wylie." For Sir Charles Wylie's very definite view was that strong tea was a dangerous poison, to which the only safe antidote was a good deal of beer, slightly laced; and in the bar of the Golden Lamb he had found a number of habitués who were quite willing to help him apply his remedy. Also, the news of a dead body in Sir Charles's own creek had spread rapidly round the village, and a number of inquiring souls had arrived who thought that the best source of further information was likely to be found in the Golden Lamb. Not that Sir Charles had much to add to what they already knew, for throughout his liquoring he retained sufficient caution to keep the odd question of the beard to himself. But he was very willing to tell, as many times as required, the story of Ronald Bittaford's spectacular arrival in the main road and the extraction of P.C. Sootham from his love affairs—at which the denizens of the bar laughed heartily—and of the finding of the body and Dr. Grainger's disgust at it—at which they laughed more heartily still. The police doctor was not really popular with the bar, several of whose members he had handled with what they considered unnecessary roughness, when they were brought up under suspicion of having drink taken. Altogether, it was a very pleasant two or three hours, at the end of which Wylie, having disposed of nearly all

the loose cash on his person, drove half the way to North Sawford before it occurred to him to put his lights on. When he observed this error, he got out and spent some little time reposing in the security of the hedge before pursuing his way. The conviction was hot within him that he had information of great importance to impart at headquarters, and he was doubtful of the chief constable's attitude towards information imparted on a breath too heavily laden with whisky.

Colonel Wyndham, however, was not in the room when he entered; and it was occupied only by Inspector Cavanagh and another police officer, Dr. Grainger, and a tall man he did not know, who was sitting quietly in a corner apparently listening to the conversation of the others. The conversation, it appeared, was not giving them particular pleasure, for all their faces looked worried. Cavanagh, it is true, spared a smile for the newcomer, but Dr. Grainger favoured him with a glance of ill-temper, and the other policeman only retained an expression of wooden gloom.

"Hallo, Cavanagh!" Wylie said cheerfully. "It's all right, don't look so worried. I haven't come to lay an information against anybody, nor to be arrested. I'm a bit drunk, but not as drunk as Grainger would like." He returned the scowl with a charming smile. "I've just come to give you a bit of information about the corpse you picked up in my backyard."

"Any information you can give us will be very welcome, Sir Charles," said the inspector. "Do you know Detective-Sergeant Edgeworth—Sir Charles Wylie—Superintendent Wilson?" The last to the man in the corner.

"Wilson?" Wylie looked a little puzzled, as he shook hands. "I seem to have heard of you in some connection or other. Are you an expert at something—chess, or what?"

"Crime happens to be my line, in so far as I can claim to be an expert," the tall man replied. "I'm from Scotland Yard."

"Whew! Yes!" Wylie said. "Of course! You're the man who found that French detective strangled with his mouth full of cash, aren't you?[1] Stupid of me not to remember. But, I say, Scotland Yard! Meaning the late Mr. Bittaford was murdered, eh, what?"

"It doesn't mean anything of the sort, sir," Cavanagh said rather sharply. "Mr. Wilson is staying in the neighbourhood, and Colonel Wyndham—er—thought he might be interested."

"Having a passion for busmen's holidays. Quite so," said Wylie, with an enormous wink. "Morbid love for your job you must have, Mr. Wilson, if a common drowning can call you from your well-earned rest." Dr. Grainger lifted his eyebrows as though to ask how long this half-witted intruder was to be allowed to waste his time; and Wylie continued rapidly, "And I suppose you haven't found anything that would repay your interest, have you? No? All faces models of discretion. Well, *I* have, and I've come all the way here to tell you—or to ask you, if you like—Who shaved the late Mr. Percy Bittaford in such a hurry?"

"We can see for ourselves he's shaved, if that's all you've come to tell us," the police doctor interrupted disagreeably.

"*Been* shaved, I said," Wylie corrected him. "And by somebody who was either no good at his job, or in a frightful hurry."

"What makes you say that?" Superintendent Wilson inquired from his corner.

"Well, because of his tufty appearance, for one thing." Wylie rapidly repeated the gist of the con-

[1] See the *The Great Southern Mystery*, by G. D. H. and Margaret Cole. Wylie's recollection was, however, as inaccurate as usual.

versation he had had at the Golden Lamb. "No self-respecting barber would shave a man like that. Nor would anybody else, for that matter, unless he was damned incompetent or in a frightful hurry."

"Might he not have done it himself?" Wilson suggested.

"I can't see myself doing the job as badly as that, can you?" Wylie replied. "Especially as he'd apparently only worn the object in question for a few months, and so must have known all about shaving. Eh? What's that?" He looked up quickly as a glance passed between the police surgeon and Dr. Cavanagh. "Oh, all right, if you won't tell me, you won't. The policeman's lot is a perfectly discreet one, isn't it? Only I shouldn't tell our friend Sootham, if I were you. *He's* very lacking in discretion What was I saying? Oh, yes, Mr. Bittaford's chin. Well, hang it all"—he turned to Wilson—"*you've* cut yourself shaving, I've no doubt, a hundred times. But—did you ever give yourself a slash in the middle of the cheek? Or right on your upper lip? It's absurd; and, what's more, I don't believe anybody shaving a chap with his head the right way up would have done it. It suggests to me that the late Mr. Bittaford found a friend to shave him while he was asleep—or unconscious —or——"

"Or dead?" Wilson suggested, as he stopped.

"Or dead. And the last two possibilities are a good deal more likely than the first, because it'd be pretty difficult, unless you were dead drunk, to sleep on solidly while a bloke hacked off your beard like that."

"My dear Wylie," Dr. Grainger interrupted again, "you don't need to teach me my business. Of course, I can see that he was shaved, and shaved forcibly, too. That's perfectly ele-mentary." He half-checked himself in the middle of the last word, and Wylie's sharp eyes,

looking for the clue, caught the briefest flicker of amusement on the face of the man in the corner. As a matter of fact, Wilson was recollecting with what difficulty he had persuaded the police officer to reach that "elementary" conclusion. He looked with some interest, however, at Wylie's face, as though appraising his powers of observation.

"Snubbed again!" the latter said; and appeared really crestfallen. "I'd made sure I'd got something to tell you. But look here"—to Cavanagh—"isn't that a bit of a puzzle for you? I mean, *who* shaved the late Percy Bittaford? And why? And why did he make him drunk or whatever it was before he did it? That's what you want to know, I take it."

"Aye," said Detective-Sergeant Edgeworth from his chest. He had a deep voice which creaked uncomfortably, and he seemed determined to converse, if possible, without moving his lips. "Aye. That's it."

"It isn't only that," said Cavanagh, and hesitated, while the doctor frowned at him.

"Go on, then, man, what is it? Damn you," said Wylie, "you might remember that the corpse was found on *my* grounds. It's my corpse, in a manner of speaking, and if there's anything fishy about it, I think I'm entitled to know if it's a crime you're hinting at. I don't mind telling you I haven't any alibi for the time the chap was put into the water."

"What time was that?" Wilson asked quickly.

"I've no idea. Don't be too sharp with a poor sinner," said Wylie. "I mean, my alibi's for when he wasn't—supposing, of course, he got in somewhere near where he came up. I'd better put it more clearly. When I saw him, he was lying on perfectly smooth mud—the tide had been up and covered any footprints or things like that. But it was pretty near high tide—it must have been a good ten hours since the water'd been over

those parts. Now I'm excellently provided from seven o'clock onwards, because I'd been making a night of it, and my old family retainer will swear that I rolled home about seven, had a bath and a spot of bed, and hung about the place afterwards till close on four o'clock. You can't pick holes in that, anyhow; old Hewitt's bribed to stick to whatever I tell him. But the night out was a bit of a hectic one—I'm not sure that any of us could have told what the rest were doing—and for that and the day before, which is what I expect you'll want to know about, I've nothing that would be the slightest use. So I'm anxious to know what you're up to—especially as it looks to me as though the chap did get into the water somewhere hereabouts."

"Oh! What makes you think that?" Wilson asked.

"Because of the tides. It's a little difficult to explain to you, unless you know this coast pretty well—but the entrance to that creek is extra narrow. Like this." He lurched over to the inspector's table—curious, Wilson thought, that a man should betray his unsobriety in his legs alone—and unceremoniously pulled a pencil and writing-pad towards him and began drawing. "There, that's the sort of shape. And past the mouth there's a bit of a race, so that the bulk of the water misses the mouth and goes on up the coast. We get pretty sluggish tides up there, for that reason, and hardly any heavy flotsam. I don't say a body *couldn't* have drifted in; but I do say, if it went in in the open sea, it's ten to one it wouldn't have come calling on me, but would have fetched up somewhere in the direction of Swale Point. That's what I mean."

"Aye," said Sergeant Edgeworth. "That's it."

"Precisely," said Wilson. "May I congratulate you, Sir Charles? That was just the conclusion which the inspector was reaching."

"Oh! But what other conclusions was he reaching?

That's what I want to know," said Wylie, gesticulating with his borrowed pencil over Cavanagh's head. " What has he been up to? And what are you all being so mysterious about? "

There was a brief exchange of glances between Wilson and the inspector, after which the latter spoke slowly.

" I don't think there's any reason against telling you, Sir Charles," he said. " Particularly as it'll be common property before long. But, if I tell you, I must ask you to promise to keep it to yourself until I give the word."

" Mum," said Wylie promptly. " See it wet, see it dry. Never mind Grainger; it's his business to be suspicious."

" Well, it's only that the body isn't the body of Percy Bittaford, it seems."

" Not Percy! But why. . . But look here, Cavanagh, surely you're barking up the wrong tree. Because his nephew—the lad who found him, you know, and who lived with him till a year or so ago—is quite certain it's his. I've just been pressing him on that very point, as it happens, and he's absolutely positive. What on earth makes you think he's wrong? "

" Because," said the inspector, " Percy Bittaford's apparently been dead six months."

" *What?* Well, what a chap! How do you know? "

" We wired the people at Yeovil," said Cavanagh, " to go and break the news to Percy Bittaford's wife and bring her over here. They sent a man along, who didn't find her in. But the people at the garage said he'd been dead six months."

" Well! " said Wylie again. " But if he isn't dead, who is he? The other chap, I mean."

" That's what we don't know, yet," said Cavanagh. ' We've had the Yeovil people on to us again; but it doesn't help much as yet. They stuck around, naturally, until Mrs. Bittaford came back, to see if they couldn't

clear up the puzzle; and when she did they explained to her that the body had been identified by the man's own nephew. The upshot of it all is that she and his late partner—a man called Dawes—have been persuaded to come here as soon as they can, to see if they can't throw a little light. I gather she's anxious to see the boy, or she wouldn't have come. But it seems *she* says Percy is dead too, and she ought to know."

"But, I say, then—the nephew must have been wrong. But he sounded perfectly positive. What's he make of the new idea?"

"It hasn't been put to him yet," Cavanagh said. "And, if you remember, sir, you promised to keep it to yourself."

"Right you are, so I will. You shall do it all your own way. What on earth's happening?" said Wylie, as a loud and tempestuous noise, as of somebody in a great hurry and a violent rage, was heard outside the door. In a moment it resolved itself into Colonel Wyndham, red and angry and stamping as though he had his field boots on. "What's up, Wyndham?"

The colonel pushed him aside as though he had been an umbrella-stand, and banged a folded newspaper down on the table in front of Cavanagh, who had risen at his entrance. "What's all this, Cavanagh? What's this mean?" he shouted.

Sergeant Edgeworth with large, unhurrying fingers unfolded the sheet, which belonged to an Exeter evening paper. "Tragedy in a Devonshire Creek," it said. "Yeovil Garage Proprietor Found Drowned by Nephew." Thereupon followed a description of Mr Percy Bittaford, his body, his nephew, and of all the other persons who had been present at the afternoon's performance. The fact that Ronald, pleasure-hunting, had come upon the body of his uncle whom he thought to be miles away was enough to make a story of it, and a story it had

certainly become. It filled two full columns of the paper, complete with streamer headlines and smudgy portraits of Colonel Wyndham and Sir Charles Wylie, which were presumably the only ones available. Mr. Hanson had been unprovided with a camera ; but apart from that he had done his best.

Wylie craned under the colonel's arm, and began reading the paper, half-aloud and with many chuckles. " ' The police surgeon, after a very slight examination. That's got you, Grainger. He noticed you gave the late lamented the widest berth you could. Well, colonel, we seem to be getting into the limelight a bit, don't we ? "

" *Limelight !* " the colonel spluttered. " And there are two damned little ticks on my doorstep, calling themselves London reporters ! We shall have half a hundred here in the morning ! This is some of your monkey tricks, Charles ! " He turned on Wylie fiercely.

" It is not. Keep your hair on," said Wylie.

" You've been talking to some of your——"

" I haven't. Keep a civil tongue in your head, Wyndham. As a matter of fact, you did it yourself, letting that little chap hang around all the while you and Grainger were doing your business. Any one with half an eye could have seen what he was up to. I had nothing whatever to do with it, so you can put that into your pipe and smoke it ! " said Wylie, beginning to get angry.

" Well, if you've nothing whatever to do with it, I don't see what you're doing here," the colonel said. " And I'd be obliged if you'd clear out, anyway. I've private business which doesn't want outsiders."

" Except from Scotland Yard. Right-o," said Wylie, turning to go. At the door he stopped for a parting shot. " You can rely on me, Cavanagh. *I* won't spill the beans to anybody."

When he had gone, the five men looked at one another in silence for a moment.

"What the devil you want to give private information to that impudent young waster for, I can't imagine!" Dr. Grainger burst out at last. "Ten to one, if there *is* anything fishy about this death, he's mixed up in it somehow. He's the worst-minded, most vicious puppy in the countryside!"

"Oh, no, he isn't," said the colonel, who was a just man even in his wrath "He's irresponsible and he's saucy, but I've never known him do anything really serious."

"Who is he?" Wilson asked with some interest. "He struck me as rather exceptionally observant, if I may say so."

"He? His name is Sir Charles Wylie. He's a baronet, tenth or eleventh, I think, in his line, who lives down at Gracehouses, that place on the Stone Road, by the creek where the body was found. His family owns some property or other in one of the big northern towns—Leeds, I think it is—so he's not dependent on what he gets off his estates. The father—Sir Charles Wylie—was a model landowner, very much interested in the welfare of the labourers, too—their moral welfare," the colonel said; and Inspector Cavanagh looked up with a face that spoke volumes.

"Sunday closing, eh?" Wilson suggested.

"That's it, sir," Edgeworth suddenly said, with a trace of expression on his features. "Never so much as a drink anywhere hereabouts on a Sunday, not so long as the old gentleman lived. Regular funeral, the place was."

"Perhaps he ***did*** overdo it a little," the colonel admitted. "Anyway, he died five years ago. He'd trained up his elder son to succeed him—made him a farmer and a business man and all that—and Anthony Wylie

would certainly have carried on the tradition. Unfortunately, he was killed in a motor accident just before his father's death, and this boy succeeded, who'd never been trained at all. In fact, I might almost say he hadn't been educated. He got into some stupid row at school—something about refusing to fag, or some such nonsense—and his father took him away and sent him abroad on a short allowance, where I'm sure he didn't do anything worth doing. Like all these young idiots, he fancied himself as a painter, or a writer, or both; but he never painted or wrote anything *I* ever heard of. There was a time when he called himself a picture dealer—went about the country hawking pictures, but old Sir Charles very soon put a stop to that Cut off his allowance, and after he'd spent a little time living on twopence-ha'penny he very soon found it wasn't worth it. Then, to cut a long story short, he came suddenly into the title, and the cash. Since when he's done absolutely nothing whatever."

"Except make a dam fool and dam nuisance of himself," the police surgeon put in.

"Oh, yes, he's done that all right. He's got half the scallywags in the county for friends—thinking he'll come to their rescue if they get a bit of what they deserve. I don't think he's vicious, exactly," said the colonel; "but he's absolutely wild, useless, and unreliable, though Cavanagh here has always had a soft spot for him." Cavanagh was heard to murmur something indistinct about "nobody's enemy but his own."

"However, that's enough about Charles. Look here, Mr. Wilson, what are we to do about this damnable stuff?" He gesticulated at the paper.

"I shouldn't worry," Wilson said. "It was bound to come out in a day or two. You've only got it a few hours in advance—and the sooner the papers start, the

sooner they're likely to get tired," he added with experience.

"Yes, but they're talking about murder!" the colonel cried.

"Well, it's not impossible that it was murder, is it?"

"It seems to me extraordinarily unlikely. You Scotland Yard people, if you'll excuse me saying it," said Dr. Grainger, with a sour smile, "are rather apt to magnify curious incidents into crimes. If the man was forcibly shaved before he fell into the water, it doesn't follow that anybody pushed him there. And as to those marks on his neck—they may be anything."

"Marks on his neck?" the colonel asked.

"Dr. Grainger," said Wilson with smooth irony, while the doctor fidgeted, "has discovered certain marks on the neck of the body which suggest that some violence was done to it while it was alive."

"Do you mean he was strangled?" the colonel asked.

"No, certainly not," Dr. Grainger said. "If there was any force used, it was nothing like enough to kill him. In fact, if he was held down and forcibly shaved, those marks are pretty much what I should expect to find." He stared firmly at Wilson, who only looked a little puzzled.

"Any light," the latter asked at last, "on how he came to get into the water?"

"None," said the colonel. "At least, nothing that would tell you anything on Charles's side of the water, or on Vincent's, so far as we've looked. Vincent wasn't any too pleased to have our fellows searching. But the whole place is as blank as the chap's pockets were."

"Of course, he may have got in from a boat, either in the open sea—though Wylie didn't seem to think that probable—or in the creek itself. How likely, in that event, is he to have been observed?"

"Not a bit likely, in the creek," said Colonel Wyndham

gloomily. " It's all thickly wooded, and if he came in by night, there's not a chance in a hundred of anybody having seen him, and not much more in the daytime. If it was the open sea, of course, that depends."

" If he came in a boat, where would that boat be likely to come from ? "

" Foulness, if he got it from the nearest place," the colonel said. " But we don't know that he did. He might have come from anywhere. In fact, we don't know who he is, we don't know who he was with—if he was with anybody—or where he came from, and we haven't got a thing to go on in looking for him, as far as I can see."

" Not much, I agree," Wilson admitted. " Let's hope you get some more by to-morrow. Perhaps your detested newspapers may help you there."

CHAPTER VI

A PENTECOSTAL HOPPER

SIR CHARLES WYLIE did not return to the Golden Lamb that night, after all. When he left the North Sawford Police Station he decided that he wanted to think for a little before again meeting his two protégés, and to think, particularly, upon the curious puzzle of Mr. Percy Bittaford's identity, or rather lack of identity. Further, he had definitely promised Inspector Cavanagh, for whom he had a real respect, not to pass on his newly-acquired information to the person chiefly interested, and he was too well aware of the length of his own tongue to risk an immediate conversation with Ronald Bittaford, under the circumstances. He therefore embarked upon a long night tour of the Devonshire

lanes while he thought the matter over in all its aspects, but reached no other conclusion than that "it was all damned queer," and (finally) that it was getting pretty late and that he'd better be making for home; he would go and see the kids first thing to-morrow.

It was very late, nearer three o'clock than two, and the consequence of this midnight expedition was that he overslept himself heavily, and it was not until just upon midday that he returned to the Golden Lamb, where he found Jackson, the landlord, standing at the door of his bar, and a number of earnest inquirers waiting anxiously until the church clock should allow them to enter.

"Morning, Jackson. Nice morning for trade, eh?" said Wylie. "How're my young friends? Are you treating them nicely?"

"Morning, sir. You'll find your friends are all right, I think," the landlord replied. He seemed in a much better temper than on the previous afternoon, having perhaps discovered that the relatives of mysterious corpses make good advertisements for licensed premises. "They're in the bar-parlour now, if you want 'em. But they've visitors."

"Visitors? What's that?"

"Lady and gent," said the landlord. "Leastways ——" "'E ain't no gent," interrupted the inquirer who seemed to have been waiting the longest. "'Oly Moses, that's what 'e is."

"That's right," the landlord said. "Looks as if he might start preaching on the road here any moment. Salvationist, I shouldn't wonder."

"No, you're quite wrong," said Wylie, who had suddenly leaped to a conclusion. "He isn't a Salvationist, he's a Pentecostal Hopper. And if you don't know what that is, Jackson, it's just your benighted ignorance. Let me in; there's a good chap. I want to talk to him."

And, slipping through the bar, he flung open the door of the bar-parlour. " Good-morning, everybody," he said, and looked round.

There were four people in the bar-parlour. Ronald Bittaford sat at the table in almost exactly the same attitude as on the previous evening, with his head cupped in his hands, and nervous fingers rumpling his hair. A little way off, curled up in an uncomfortable and slippery arm-chair, sat Miss Dolly Daniells, with rather worried eyes fixed on the back of her lover's head. Also seated at the table, and trying with a black-gloved hand to pat Ronald's unresponsive arm, was a plumpish middle-aged woman dressed in deep black, whose weeds completely hid her face. " They do mourn in the lower middle classes," Wylie reflected to himself. " Here's this lady's husband six months dead, if what Cavanagh told me is true, and she couldn't be blacker if he'd perished yesterday." And he turned to look at the fourth occupant of the room, who was standing straddled across the narrow fireplace.

He must undoubtedly be Mr. Elisha Dawes, the dead man's partner, Wylie decided at the first glance. Here at any rate was the beard, large and black and curly, and covering a good half of his face. His hair also was black, but in this case art had been pressed into the service, and the black locks, which were obviously intended to curl like the beard, had been smoothed with grease until they clung like a thick black cap to the big skull. His brows were black and bushy in a sallow face, and under them looked out two eyes of an unexpectedly light-brown colour. He was a big fellow, a good six feet in height and broad in the shoulders, and Wylie's first reflection after studying him was, " I hope Jackson's cellars are sound. Suppose he starts hopping here." Aloud he said, " Mr. Dawes, I presume ? "

"That is my name, brother," said the big man. He had a deep and rather beautifully modulated voice, with an accent that came from the north. He would make a fine preacher, Wylie thought, with that voice and that presence. "But you——?" He looked puzzled.

"This is Sir Charles Wylie," the girl put in. "Him I told you about, Mrs. Bittaford, that was there when . . ."

"Dreadful!" said the woman at the table, in something very like a sniff. Apparently she was deeply grieved at the violent death of this gentleman who was not her husband—or was it the natural response of her class to death of any sort? Wylie did not feel he knew enough to decide; he remembered his own nurse swamped with tears at sight of the funeral of a perfect stranger. "Pleased to meet you, I'm sure, Sir Charles," she said, with another sniff and half-rising. "B-but it's a sad occasion for all of us."

"Peace!" said Elisha Dawes from the fireplace. Dolly said, "Good-morning, Sir Charles," and stared at him in a puzzled way. Ronald said nothing at all, and did not even look up. Wylie perceived that they were all waiting for him to speak, and felt curiously embarrassed.

"Good-m-morning," he said, stammering a little. "I just thought I'd drop around, you know—to see how you two were getting on—and to see if there was any news about Mr. Bittaford. Jackson's made you comfortable, I hope," to Dolly.

"Yes, thank you, Sir Charles. But"—she hesitated a little—"it seems it isn't Mr. Bittaford who's—dead, after all."

"What!" Wylie tried to simulate the surprise he ought to be feeling. "Not Mr. Bittaford? Why, Mrs. Bittaford——" He had intended to say, "this is good

news for you," or something of that sort. But surely one would not really congratulate a lady on not losing her husband six months after he had actually died. And he did not feel equal to acting his part properly. His voice died in his throat.

"It seems Mr. Bittaford's died—I mean, died six months ago," Dolly went on.

"In the fear of the Lord," said Dawes.

"No," said Ronald.

"Oh, Ronny dear, but he did! I'm sure he did!" Mrs. Bittaford cried. "You oughtn't to talk to me like that, not about your uncle."

"I didn't say anything about how he died," said Ronald, lifting his head to cast a glance of what looked to be hearty dislike of Dawes. "I said he wasn't dead —not till yesterday. By the creek"

"Ronny, how *can* you?" said his aunt, with a fresh sniff. "See here, Miss Daniells, dear, can't you make him stop going on this way? It's the shock, that's what it is, and he doesn't rightly know what he's saying. But he'll be ill if he carries on like this."

"Pardon me, madam," said Wylie, staring; "but could I ask what exactly——"

"Why it's just this way," said Mrs. Caroline Bittaford, speaking in an ordinary voice for the first time, as of one who has really got a story to tell. Immediately, however, she reverted to another sob. "*You* tell him, Elisha. I just don't seem to be able to get my tongue to it."

"It is very simple, brother," said Elisha Dawes, advancing a pace from the fireplace and fixing Wylie with his clear brown eyes. "The body which was found in the creek yesterday afternoon is not the body of Mrs. Bittaford's husband, for Mr. Percy Bittaford died of cancer last February, in the fear of the Lord. This wilful young man"—he looked at Ronald's head—

" fled from his home and his duty more than a year ago, leaving no word nor address for those who had been parents to him. So he could receive no word of his uncle's end, and now he refuses to believe it. That is all."

" But——" Wylie stammered. " But—I mean, he was so sure yesterday that it was Mr. Bittaford."

" It *was*," came in a muffled voice from Ronald.

" I mean, he must be very like Mr. Bittaford. . . . Well, dash it all, who do you suppose he *was* ? "

" Mrs. Bittaford does not know, certainly," said Elisha Dawes, " because the police have not yet asked her to view the body But she believes that, if the likeness is so strong, it may be the body of Mr. Bittaford's brother."

" Oh, I see ! " A sudden flash of comprehension and pity came to Wylie. " The father of—— ? " He glanced at the boy at the table.

" No," said Dawes. " No. Ronald's father is dead many years But Mr. Bittaford had another brother, named Harold, who had been out of the country a long while, but who resembled him closely."

" Had he a beard ? " Wylie asked, and then could have bitten his tongue out at the indiscretion. Dawes glanced at Mrs. Bittaford as it were in inquiry, and nodded.

" Yes," he said. " He had when he was last seen. I should add, brother, that Mr. Harold Bittaford had returned to this country some months ago. Mrs. Bittaford has even seen him ; but he was not in close connection with his family, and she has no idea, if this body be his, where he had been living and how he came to be in these parts."

" I see," said Wylie reflectively. " Where was he living before, d'you know ? "

" In Australia. In the goldfields. I greatly fear," said

Dawes, " that Harold Bittaford did not live a godly life, and that he did not make his end in the fear of the Lord. Friends ! " His voice suddenly leapt a couple of tones and became at least twice as loud. " Let us put up a prayer to Almighty God for the soul of Harold Bittaford ! " He fell on his knees abruptly, with his arms flung out before him and resting on the edge of the table, and began a deep-voiced rambling prayer for " the soul of thy servant Harold Bittaford, now said to be lying in the mortuary at North Sawford." —" I hope it's properly labelled," Wylie thought irreverently—and continued with a list of all the sins, which were many, for which the corpse might conceivably require pardon. Mrs. Bittaford sobbed unrestrainedly as the prayer proceeded. Wylie, caught between wind and water, hovered uncertainly about, and at last sidled along to where Miss Daniells was sitting and softly murmured, " Come outside a minute, won't you ? " She nodded, though with a troubled eye on Ronald ; and a second or two later they slipped out, leaving the sonorous voice resounding through the room.

" Back way," said Wylie hastily. ' Half the place is listening-in at the front." He drew her out into the paved backyard. " For God's sake ! What does it all mean ? "

" Why, just that, I suppose," said the girl. " That wasn't Uncle Percy we found yesterday, because Uncle Percy's dead. But it's Uncle Harold who lived in Australia and came home last year That's all right, isn't it ? '

" But she—Mrs. Bittaford—hasn't even seen it ! The body, I mean. And there he goes praying for Harold Bittaford's soul. Why, he doesn't even know it's Harold Bittaford. Suppose it's somebody else all the time—what's God to make of it, d'you suppose ? "

"Dunno," said Dolly. "Anyway, he's seen it. Mr. Dawes has."

"Oh, he has. Did he know Harold Bittaford, then, too?"

"Oh, yes, that's all right," Dolly said. "He met him when he came to England, a long time ago—before Uncle Percy died, I mean."

"And before Ronald went away?"

"No, after. That's why Ron didn't know him, see, not ever seeing him 'cos he was in Australia. He knew he'd got an Uncle Harold, all right, only he'd never seen him."

"Well, but——" Wylie was puzzled. "If he knew he had, then why——?"

"I don't know!" The girl looked up with eyes into which fear had entered. "Mr.—Sir Charles, I don't know! There's something queer happening to Ron! He's been acting sort of crazy ever since you left. And he won't go and fetch the bike, says he won't go near the place for a thousand pounds. And he was walking up and down half the night—I heard him. And when these people came—well, you see what it's like. He won't speak to them even, proper, not as he ought if she's his aunt, and he just goes on saying 'It is! It is!' like that. You—you don't think"—she came a little nearer and caught him by the coat—"you don't think he's going cuckoo, do you?"

"Not a bit of it, my child," Wylie responded heartily. "Just shock and upset, enough to worry anybody. And I should think that chap in there's a bit of a trial, what? How long've they been here, by the way?"

"Only about an hour or a bit more. But he's had four prayers and a hymn already," the girl responded with scorn. "I know 'em. My uncle used to be taken that way, sometimes. But he's the worst I ever saw, with that great big bellow of his."

"Well, at any rate, he isn't hopping. Let's be thankful for small mercies," said Wylie, with a grin. "Look here, Miss Daniells, I won't keep you. I can see you're wanting to get back——"

"It's only Ron," she murmured. "I don't know——"

"Of course. Quite right. I'm sure you're the best person for him. I only just wanted to get it straight. You hang on, that's right; and I'll stand by. I can't do anything to-day, I'm afraid, because I've promised to go fishing with a chap. But I'll keep an eye on things for you—you'll have to stick around here a bit, I'm afraid, for the inquest."

"It's the day after to-morrow. They've sent us papers," Dolly said "And that—that great crow's got to stay on too, he says."

"That's bad luck," Wylie agreed. "But keep him off your young man as much as you can. He doesn't look to me as though he'd stand much psalmody, just now. Perhaps his aunt will help a bit."

"Her!" Dolly sniffed. "She's about as much use as a sponge. She's done nothing but drip and sniff since she came; Ron always said she was a sensible sort of a woman, but I must say I don't see it myself."

"Well, well," Wylie soothed her. "Perhaps she'll be better in a while. It must be a bit of a shock, you know, losing two husbands in six months. Oh, that's all right—I know she hasn't really. Well, so long. I'll be around some time to-morrow."

CHAPTER VII

TOO MANY NAMES

"AND that was?" Superintendent Wilson of the C.I.D. asked of the chief constable, as a clergyman of the Established Church, with a long nose and a general air of dissatisfaction, retired from the room. He had been bidden to enter a minute or two before the interview terminated, and noted with a smile of amusement that it appeared to have given little pleasure to the chief constable.

"The Reverend Derwent Bittaford," the latter growled.

"Relative of the deceased—whichever he is?"

"Not on your life! Just 'thought he might be a connection—seeing it's such a sad case;' but as far as I can make out he's never had any relative disappear in his life, or any reason to think the dead man was anything in the wide world to do with him. Simply ghoulish curiosity! And it's the same with all of them," the colonel said.

"All of them? Why, are there any more?"

"That's the fifth to-day," the colonel groaned, "and goodness knows how many more there'll be to come. There was this chap, and Miss Elsie Bittaford, who does dressmaking, and I shouldn't think ever had had any relations. She looks more like a piece of a sewing-machine than a human being. Then there was a larky lad from a bank in Truro, called Ralph Bittaford, who turned up with a pal. I think *he'd* done it for a bet, but Cavanagh let him have a look at the body, just to teach him, and I don't think he'll do it again in a hurry."

"Then you're not letting them all have private views?"

"Not on your life! What's the use, unless they have some idea of some relative of theirs whom it might be. There was Miss Amelia Bittaford, who thought he might be her uncle who was supposed to have died in Egypt during the Boer War—and who, as far as I can see, would be about ninety-five if he'd survived to the present day. And Mr. Thomas Bittaford, butcher, of Salisbury. He was the most honest of the lot—simply said he'd never heard of any one of his name before, let alone one getting murdered; so he'd come along on the chance, just to see what it was all about. I'd have sworn Bittaford was an uncommon name, till this morning," the colonel said bitterly; "but now I find the British Isles are lousy with 'em. And on Sunday morning too! Confound the papers!"

"That's not counting Mr. Percy Bittaford's wife, is it?"

"No. But that's different. She really does think she knows this corpse, though she doesn't seem as certain as I should like about it. I don't mean she says it isn't, but there's something in her manner—a sort of hesitation that makes *me* hesitate. You know how unwilling people of her class are to go back on a thing once they've said it. Not that I blame her, anyhow; I understand she's only seen Harold Bittaford a few times, and, of course, the beard being gone must make a difference."

"Yes, there's the beard I suppose you're definitely convinced that the beard was removed for him?"

"Oh, yes, Grainger says he was shaved, and pretty badly shaved too. He's quite certain about that—in fact, I understood you'd talked it all over with him," said the colonel.

"And when was he shaved? Before or after death, I mean?"

"Grainger doesn't seem to know."

"Then he ought to. Look here, colonel," Wilson said. "We've agreed, more or less, that the cuts show that the man was shaved in a prone position, which in itself proves that he wasn't in a condition to resist. Of course, he might have been trussed, or unconscious, and not dead. But did you notice the edges of the cuts? They were gaping wide open; the skin hadn't drawn together at all, which in itself is a pretty clear indication that it was the skin of a dead body. You didn't notice it? Well, it's not your job, of course; but it *is* Grainger's. You know, colonel, I don't think your police surgeon has served you altogether well in this affair."

"I know," the colonel sighed. "It's not like Grainger to be so casual. He's generally reckoned a pretty efficient sort of fellow. The truth is, young Wylie put his back up, right at the start, and he's never got over it. And he was pretty maddening, you know."

"Nonsense!" said Wilson, who had little patience with other people's professional corns. "A public servant has no right to get rattled when an intelligent member of the public points out his omissions. I thought your young friend came out of it very well, and had noticed things that Grainger had no business to miss. Anyway, *I*'m pretty convinced that the beard was removed after death."

"Yes, but *why*?" the colonel said. "To disguise him—to make him look like a man who'd been dead six months? There's no sense in that; it would be bound to be spotted at once—as it has been. And then there are the marks on his neck."

"Which show he wasn't strangled, and not much more," Wilson said. "I suppose you've got the cause of death definitely settled?"

"Drowning," said Colonel Wyndham. "That's about

the one thing that is definite. There are these marks on his neck, and one or two other signs of what might be a struggle, Grainger says. And his clothes were a bit rumpled up, as they might have been if somebody had tied a sinker on to him and he'd come loose. But that's pretty conjectural. Drowning's what he died of, and the question is——"

"How he came to drown," Wilson said. "Yes. I suppose the inquest is your immediate difficulty. What sort of a verdict are you going for?"

"Well, what am I to do?" the colonel asked. "Cavanagh thinks it was murder; so do you, don't you?"

"I think," said Wilson cautiously, "that having regard to everything, the probabilities point that way."

"Probabilities, yes! But it's all so damned uncertain. Made up of little bits, at the best. Considered as a murder case, anybody could pick holes in it, and with this uncertainty as to who the fellow is, there isn't any *a priori* reason for going for murder, you see. And it might land us in a horrid hole."

"Um-m, yes. What sort of a coroner have you got?"

"Martindale, his name is. A good enough chap in himself, but a bit queer. Slow in the uptake, and inclined to argue for hours and hours."

"Will he have a jury?"

"He generally sits alone."

"Well, it ought to be fairly easy to get him to do what you want, then?"

"You think," said the colonel, "that I ought to aim at getting an open verdict to-morrow?"

"I should if I could, myself," Wilson said. "Of course, one can't quite tell how the evidence will pan out. But with this uncertainty, that's what I should personally favour."

At this point a constable knocked at the door, and brought in a note. Colonel Wyndham read it, sighed, and grimaced. "Another of 'em," he said

"What, another Bittaford?"

"No. Different name this time. But another chap who thinks he knows the corpse. Cavanagh seems to think there's something in it, so I suppose I'd better have a look at him. Right, bring him in"—to the constable. "Don't go, Wilson, unless you've got to."

The constable went out, and returned ushering a seedy looking, oldish man of rather hang-dog appearance. "Done time, I shouldn't wonder," said Wilson to himself. "And not doing any too well now." Yet the man did not seem to have anything particular on his conscience at the moment; it was rather an inability, congenital or acquired, to look anybody in the face.

"You're James Fishcote?" the colonel began.

"That's my name."

"And you think you recognise this body you've just seen?"

"Pretty sure I do."

"Then who is it?"

"It's my lodger. Least, it was till Wednesday last. Only he's took his beard off since then."

The colonel glanced at Wilson. "You're sure you know him," said the latter. "Even though he has lost his beard? How did you recognise him?"

James Fishcote scratched his head. "By 'is cloes, mostly, sir," he said. "I'd know those trousis anywhere. Many's the time my missus 'as brushed them for him, and they've been 'anging up in our kitchen by the hour. And 'e's got a sort of a whitish scratch, side of 'is nose like. I'd take my oath it's 'im. And, anyway, 'e went out sudden on Wednesday morning early and never came back, and never took nothing of 'is own. So when

we saw the picture in the papers, my missus she says I'd better pop along and see. So I've come."

"And you've recognised him?"

"That's right."

"And his name is?"

"Henry George, sir." The colonel started.

"You're sure of that?"

"Well, that's what 'e said," Fishcote said, looking a trifle sullen. "'E'd ought to know, oughtn't 'e?"

"Well," said Wilson, "tell us some more about him. Where do you live? And how long had he been living with you?"

Fishcote was not good at telling a connected story. He preferred, it seemed, to be asked questions, and even to those his answers were as jejune as they could possibly be. It emerged eventually, that he and his wife were living down in Teignmouth. Formerly, they had been in service; but they had saved a bit ("or pinched a bit?" Wilson wondered), and had set up for themselves in a small way, and took in a lodger or two to help make ends meet. Mr. Henry George had been lodging with them since last May. He was a single man—Fishcote seemed rather doubtful whether or not to use the word "gentleman"—and didn't seem to have any occupation, though he was frequently away for week-ends. He paid his bills regularly and had no letters. On the Wednesday morning previous he had gone out, saying he had to meet a friend in the town and would not be in for his usual midday meal. He had said nothing about supper, and when he did not come in they had finally gone to bed, leaving the door on the latch. But he had never come back, nor had anything been heard of him since, until Fishcote had seen his dead body lying in the mortuary at North Sawford. Yes, he was quite positive that it was Mr. George's dead body and no one else's. No, he didn't

seem to have any worries, not to speak of, though he was a bit disagreeable at times. And that, it seemed, was all Mr. Fishcote knew.

"You'll have to stay here the night, my man," the colonel said, dismissing him. "You'll be wanted to say this at the inquest to-morrow. Understand that?"

Yes, Mr. Fishcote understood; and slouched his way out of the room. A distinctly beery aroma lingered on the air after his departure.

"Well, what do you think *now*?" the colonel asked, flinging himself back in his chair. "I should say that chap was a pretty fishy character. I don't know that I believe a word he says."

"What do I think? I think," said Wilson, "that your corpse has got too many names."

CHAPTER VIII

A CORONER SITS ALONE

DR. ALEC MARTINDALE, the coroner at North Sawford, was not by any means the brisk, peppery official whom one instinctively associates with the police service. He was long and lanky, and pale; he had a stoop and kind, worried eyes; and he looked, in fact, more like a rather overworked university tutor than anything else. He did not bully his witnesses; he obviously intended, in fact, to be kind to them; but his incapacity to handle persons who did not speak his language, coupled with his anxiously conscientious desire to get at the real truth and nothing but the truth, must often have made him more of a trial than the most hectoring drill sergeant could have been. Wilson, who had stayed in Devonshire to learn the result of the inquest, saw with

amusement that Inspector Cavanagh was stationed unobtrusively at the coroner's elbow. To jog him on? or to shut him up? he wondered.

The coroner's difficulties began early, with the finding of the body and the cause of death. The question of the body's identity, in view of its many aliases, had been postponed by general agreement. Ronald Bittaford, looking white and far away, deposed in a whispered voice to his discovery in the creek. Dr Martindale, unfortunately, was very hazy about the geography of Studleigh Pepperton, and regarded it as of the highest importance to establish exactly where the body had lain. He put Ronald, who was nearly equally hazy, through a slow and laborious examination about distances, angles, and points of the compass, in which almost all the boy's answers had to be repeated, either because he had not understood the question or because the coroner had failed to hear the answer

"But, surely, my boy," he said with weary gentleness, "you must understand a plain question I am only asking you whether the body was lying east and west, or north and south. I mean, were the feet pointing in the direction of the sun, or not? Let me see, it was a fine afternoon. Now you must have noticed the sun, surely . . ."

"Dr. Martindale," an impatient voice broke in from the back of the room, "I can tell you exactly how the body was lying, if you'll give me a minute."

Dr. Martindale raised his head and gazed petulantly at the interrupter. "Excuse me, Sir Charles," he said, "I will hear you in good time, if you will kindly wait. I am at the moment asking Mr. Bittaford exactly where——"

But at that point, to the great relief of the company, Inspector Cavanagh pushed a note under the coroner's nose, who read it with great attention, having wasted

two or three minutes discovering that his spare pair of reading glasses was not in any of his pockets, but on the table.

"Oh, so the police have a plan of the spot, have they?" he said. "This is very interesting and most helpful—though I must say, inspector, it might have been even more helpful if you had produced it a little sooner. Now, then, Mr. Bittaford, if you will kindly look at that plan, and see whether the cross which marks the position of the body coincides with your recollection of where it was lying when you found it?"

"Yes," Ron muttered, having barely glanced at the plan.

"You are quite certain? You did not move it in any way?"

"No!" That answer was clear enough, at all events.

"Then what did you do?"

"Went and fetched——" An indistinguishable murmur.

"Fetched *whom*? I wish you could be a little more distinct in your replies, Mr. Bittaford."

"Sir—Sir Charles Wylie." At that point Ronald, who had been visibly swaying, dropped back against the table with a face as white as a sheet. Inspector Cavanagh, with a hasty word to the coroner, stepped forward to his rescue.

"Oh, certainly, certainly," Dr. Martindale said. "By all means. I should have thought of it myself. Very trying, certainly, poor fellow. I should have thought. . . . We will certainly proceed. Let me see, who——" He fumbled a minute with his papers, while young Bittaford was removed. "Ah, yes. Sir Charles Wylie, if you please."

Sir Charles Wylie, looking offensively in possession of his faculties, advanced and took the oath in a loud confident voice, suggesting that he was now going to

explain to the court the full truth about the death it was investigating. And indeed he was hoping to cause a sensation by bringing forward his deductions from the condition of the late Mr. Bittaford's chin. But the coroner, who was a very kind-hearted creature, was vexed with himself for his inconsiderate treatment of young Bittaford, and wished to vent his vexation on the nearest available object. Besides, Sir Charles Wylie had interrupted him without ceremony, which could not be called respectful. So Sir Charles Wylie was kept sharply and irritably to the point, and allowed only to depose to Ronald's appearance in the High Street, and his own arrival on the scene of the death. To his attempt to describe the corpse's appearance the coroner merely said, "I shall be taking the medical evidence later, Sir Charles. That will be all, thank you. Kindly stand down." And Wylie, inwardly fuming, did as he was ordered.

Dr. Grainger, who came next, fared rather better, though the coroner, fired by the prospect of a medical problem, proceeded to discuss with him at great length the probable growth of shaven beards after death—a problem which did not at all appeal to the police doctor, who was uneasily conscious all the time of Wilson's watching eye, and of his own sins of omission. But when the body had been safely transported, in retrospect, to the mortuary, and the question of its identity arose, then indeed Dr. Martindale lost himself in tangles of interminable length.

He called first Mrs. Caroline Bittaford—Elisha Dawes seemed to have gone home after all—and inquired of her who the corpse was. She, in a voice alternately round and full, and almost obliterated with sobs, explained that it was the body of Harold Bittaford, her brother-in-law, who had been in England since last February, about, but whose present address she did not

know, because he never'd been to see her since—since—— (Here a sniff ended the sentence expressively.) But she knew him? Oh, yes, she knew him. And had he a beard? No. (Surprised bleat from coroner.) At least, he had and he hadn't—she meant, he hadn't one when he came to England, but he grew one. Grew one? When? That, it seemed, Mrs. Bittaford could not see her way to recollect; but the coroner was extremely interested in this detail of Harold Bittaford's personal appearance, and pressed her several times on the point. Failing to get any satisfaction, he again asked her whether she was sure that the body was that of Harold Bittaford. "For I see here, inspecter," he remarked, with a puzzled face, "that Mr. Ronald Bittaford appears to have recognised the body under another name, or am I wrong?"

"But he couldn't, poor boy!" Mrs. Bittaford suddenly interrupted in a shrill voice; "because he was dead! But Ron didn't know, poor boy, how should he?—and not ever having set eyes on his Uncle Harold it stands to reason——"

"Because *who* was dead?" the coroner inquired. Again, Inspector Cavanagh whispered in his ear, and he nodded several times portentously and fixed his features in an expression of sympathetic gloom. "Of course, of course," he said. "Poor soul—very sad indeed——"

". . . Dead six months back and buried at Sands-on-Sea," Mrs. Bittaford was concluding some statement.

"At Sands-on-Sea? Indeed!" the coroner said. "Interesting—so far away——" He seemed to realise that reflections on the geography of England were a little out of place at the moment, and shook his head crossly at himself, dismissing the bereaved widow before him with a few "well-chosen" words, murmuring to himself, "Yes, of course. Doubtless. A strong likeness, no doubt, between brothers. Harold Bittaford. Yes——"

He was about to proceed, when his eye was caught by something on the brief in front of him, and he looked up with ill-concealed annoyance.

"James Fishcote!" he barked with unexpected ferocity; and James Fishcote, who seemed to have been very near a post-prandial nap, started, and shuffled to his feet. Wylie came out of his sulks to watch him with interest.

"I gather," said the coroner severely, "that you profess to have recognised the deceased under quite a different name from his own?"

"'E's my lodger. That's what I said," Fishcote repeated.

"And the name of your lodger is——?"

"'Enery George," said Fishcote, and repeated the gist of the story which he had told to Wilson and the chief constable on the previous afternoon. This time, however, influenced probably by much treating in the bars of North Sawford, he was much more communicative, not to say loquacious; and the coroner, who had evidently taken a dislike to Mr. Fishcote—or perhaps it was only to the appearance and smell of Mr. Fishcote—had great difficulty in checking his desire to talk at length, and in particular to descant upon the habits of his missing lodger.

"But I'm *telling* you, sir," he said in the course of one of these bouts, "what the police ought to know, s'posing they want to find out 'ow Mr. George come to be dead. There's plenty o' reason, if I was to tell you 'ow 'e useter go on——"

"You will tell that when you are asked and not before, sir!" the coroner roared. "With the relatives here—this is no time for your unpleasant insinuations! Stand down, Fishcote!" And, muttering and preparing to say many things, Fishcote stood. "Inspector Cavanagh, please."

Inspector Cavanagh came and explained that the police had as yet no knowledge of the movements of Mr. Bittaford or Mr. George immediately prior to his death, and no idea how his body came to get into the water. The police were satisfied that it must have drifted to where it was found, but whether it had drifted in from the sea or only up the creek they could not yet say. This concluded the evidence; and after a prolonged period of silence, during which he appeared to be struggling with a violent fit of mental indigestion, the coroner brought in his verdict, prefixing it with a short lecture directed at the gentlemen of the Press who were seated in front of him. "It appears," he concluded, after having surveyed the evidence from several angles, "that we may with some safety conclude that this is the body of Mr. Harold Bittaford, leaving to the police the question whether Mr. Harold Bittaford is or is not the same person as the Mr. Henry George with whom the witness, Fishcote, is apparently acquainted to some degree. It also appears that he was indubitably drowned, but how and in what manner he came to be drowned we are not at present in a position to say. I therefore bring in a verdict that this is the body of Mr. Harold Bittaford, and that he was Found Drowned. And I add thereto my very deep sympathy with the relatives of the deceased. Gentlemen, the court is closed!"

Spectators and witnesses began to move away in bunches. Wylie, walking out with a brooding air of discontent, found himself next to Superintendent Wilson, who regarded him with a smile of amusement.

"Did you find it a good entertainment?" the latter inquired. Wylie snorted.

"And that's what you call a court of inquiry! I should call it an instrument for hushing-up," he said.

CHAPTER IX

A PUZZLED POLICEMAN

"WELL, you got your verdict," said Wilson to Inspector Cavanagh, as he strolled into the latter's room to say good-bye, before returning to London on the afternoon train. "And now, I suppose, the fun begins. Is this what you want me to take back to the Yard?" "This" was a sheet of paper containing some enormous and exquisite facsimiles of the prints of some fingers and a thumb. "The corpse's, are they? I don't think it's very likely, you know, that we'll be able to find you any duplicates."

"I don't think it's likely at all," Cavanagh returned wearily. "But, as *you* know, one's got to take the one chance in a thousand. I'm sending them to Australia as well, just in case they can do anything for us there. But I don't expect they can."

"I thought you'd heard from Australia already."

"So we have; but it's not much help. The Sydney people know of a Harold Bittaford, who lived at a shadyish address in one of their back quarters, and called himself a commission agent. He vanished from their ken somewhere near the end of last year, when they were inclined to suspect him of being mixed up with some bucket-shop frauds. But they don't know the exact date, and they can't trace his having sailed from Sydney anywhere. Of course, he may not have gone under his own name, and if he didn't, that makes it all the harder. I don't gather that his late associates are particularly anxious to come forward."

"Your idea, then, is that the late Mr. Harold Bittaford was a crook?"

"Well, it looks a bit like it, doesn't it?" Cavanagh said. "This growing a beard and all—you noticed, of course, that his sister-in-law said it was a new idea. And having no communications to speak of with his relatives in England—sounds as though he was living a retiring sort of life. And if this fellow Fishcote's story is true—which it mayn't be, of course—it makes him more retiring still."

"The theory is, then, that he was hiding—from whom? From one of his Australian friends, whom he'd double-crossed?" Cavanagh nodded. "Then the friend, whoever he is, must have followed him out to England It's odd, by the way, if that theory's the right one, that he didn't grow his beard on the boat, which seems a good opportunity."

"Perhaps he didn't know he was being followed," Cavanagh suggested, "till he'd been in England for a bit. Or perhaps he thought he'd be too noticeable, growing it on the boat."

"Perhaps he did. Anyway, he hides when he's in England, and then his friend comes up with him and kills him—at least, I suppose that must be our idea. In a boat? Or where?"

"Goodness knows At least, I should think it must have been in a boat; but where the boat came from or where it's got to now, there's practically no means of finding out I'm having the nearby places combed; but it's a very long job, particularly as we haven't any idea what the other chap looked like—if there *was* another chap. We know nothing about Harold Bittaford, except that he had a beard when he was alive. But he may have been tied up, or had a sack over his face, or gone on board in the dark, or anything. It's like looking for a needle in a haystack when you don't know whether it's a needle or a screwhammer you're after—or whether, for that matter, it's there at all!"

"And why," said Wilson, "do we think that our hypothetical friend shaved the dead Mr. Bittaford?"

"Goodness knows," said Cavanagh again, "unless it's the mark of some crazy secret society—which it isn't, of course. I can't imagine any reason on God's earth for doing it. But, as I told you, I can't make head or tail of the thing anyhow."

"You don't think," Wilson ruminated, "that the other brother, who must presumably have existed—I mean, the father of the young man who found the body—comes into the picture at all?"

"Charles Bittaford, you mean. Oh, no, he's dead—deader than Percy. He was shot in France in 1915, and shot by court martial, too, thank God, so there's no risk of that being wrong. But I agree—if what you're driving at is that there's something queer about the lad. It's funny, however you look at it, his running straight into that body, and then persisting against all reason that it was somebody it couldn't possibly have been. We had a great scene with him after the inquest, you know, because he wanted to go and scrag Martindale for giving the corpse the wrong name. He nearly went mad about it. But what it all means I dunno."

"Nor do I," said Wilson. "And I'm afraid I can't do anything more for you just now. We'll get those finger-prints looked up for you, and see if we can run across any traces of Mr. Harold Bittaford. And if you want anything else, or any other help, just let us know. I ought to be going, or I shall miss my train."

He was just reaching his hand to take the exhibits, when there was a loud and peremptory knock, followed, before Cavanagh had had time to answer, by a flinging open of the door, and the entry of a slightly dishevelled figure, which began abruptly, "Look here, Cavanagh, what does this——" and stopped when it caught sight of the sheet on the table.

"Oho!" it said, with a grin, and in quite a different tone of voice. "Thumb-prints, what? So you've decided it's a criminal case, after all. Whose are they? The corpse's, or the berluggy murderer's? And what are you going to do with them?"

"Put them away," said Cavanagh promptly, rolling the sheet up and putting it into Wilson's case, which lay close by his hand. "And you'll excuse me, Sir Charles, but this is private business. Colonel Wyndham——"

"Oh, it's Wyndham, is it, who said I wasn't to be let in?" Wylie, who was obviously in a very bad temper, retorted angrily. "Let me tell you, Cavanagh, that you're making a bloody mess of the whole thing, and if that's what you call 'getting the public confidence,' I call it hushing things up. You know perfectly well there's something fishy about this chap's death, but all you're concerned about is to get an open verdict and save your silly faces, so that there shan't be another 'unexplained murder' on the records. Well, I'm not satisfied, let me tell you, and I'm on the bench. I'm going to take steps to see that when a chap's found dead in my grounds, the police don't get away with putting up a miserable goat of a coroner, without even a jury, to say Found Drowned for them. Oh, no"—as Cavanagh tried to intervene—"I know it isn't altogether your fault. You've taken the best advice"—he glared suddenly at Wilson—"and you're acting under orders, and nobody wants a nasty scandal in the county. But I'm not going to let it alone at that. I shan't come here any more, as Wyndham's so kindly intimated that you don't want amateur assistance; but I'm going to look into the thing on my own, and believe me, you'll be sorry that you weren't a bit more oncoming!" With which parting shot he flung out of the room, while Cavanagh, with a smile and a shrug of his shoulders, set about tidying his papers.

"What's the matter?" Wilson asked. "And what is he going to do?"

"Nothing! The matter is just that Dr. Martindale wouldn't let him give his evidence about the beard being shaved—not that we particularly wanted it to come out, but if I'd been the doctor I'd have let him say some of it, just to keep him happy. And then he badgered Colonel Wyndham till he said he wasn't to be let in again—but I suppose he got round somebody with that long tongue of his. He must have been drinking, too, by the looks of him. But he won't do anything, you'll see. That's Sir Charles all over—up one minute and down the next. He'll have forgotten all about it by to-morrow."

"I see. Well, good-bye and good luck to your fishing. We'll help you all we can," Wilson said; and, for all his parting words, as soon as he was safely in the London train, he put the troubles of Inspector Cavanagh clean out of his mind. Scotland Yard cannot afford to perplex its wits unnecessarily with the troubles of the countryside.

CHAPTER X

HUSH-MONGERING

WHETHER or not Inspector Cavanagh was right in his rather uncomplimentary summing up of Sir Charles Wylie's powers of recollection will never be known, for the baronet's mind was recalled to the subject in question before even the most sieve-like memory could have mislaid it. As he emerged from the door of the police station and started off at a hot pace, making for nowhere in particular, he cannoned into a figure that

was wandering vaguely across the pavement, and sent it reeling against the wall.

"Oh, I say, sorry!" said Sir Charles, looking up; and was mildy surprised to see a menacing fist shaken, somewhat vaguely, in his direction.

"'Ush-monger!" said Mr. Fishcote in a rather thick voice. "'Ush-monger!"

"Hush-*what*?" Wylie asked. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"'Ush-*monger*," said Mr. Fishcote, who seemed pleased with his new word. "C-conspiracy to defeat the hends of justice. 'Ush-monger." He laid a rather shaky hand on Wylie's jacket.

"My good fellow," the latter returned impatiently, "I'm not in any conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice. I've nothing whatever to do with the police—in fact, if you want to know, I've just had a bloody row with them. Let my coat alone, can't you? I tell you I'm not in a conspiracy!"

"Then why," said Mr. Fishcote, retaining the coat; "why don't you let a—a—a *voter* tell what 'e knows? If that isn't 'ush-mongering, I dunno what is. And you in with them blokes an' all." He cocked his free thumb in the direction of the police station. "'Ush-mongers, that's what they are," he said again.

"Look here," said Wylie, suddenly jerking himself free. He put a hand on Mr. Fishcote's greasy collar, and with a strength that surprised that gentleman, swung him round so as to look straight into his face. "Look here, do you mean you've got something to tell about that fellow that was taken out of my creek—something that you weren't allowed to tell at the inquest?"

"Uh-huh," gurgled Mr. Fishcote, the grip on his collar making clearer speech difficult.

"Because, if that's so, you'd better come and tell

it me now. Those fellows in there are trying to cover everything up; but I'm a magistrate, and I mean to get at the truth!" With a shake he released Mr. Fishcote, who backed in terror.

"Oo, I didn't mean! I mean, I dunno as there's anything, your worship. I never said nuthin' . . ."

"You fool, you don't need to get into a bait—I'm not on the bench now. *I* don't care what you've been doing or what you haven't. Look here, Fishcote"—as Mr. Fishcote still staggered against the wall, with the expression of one confronted unexpectedly with a basilisk—"you *are* Fishcote, aren't you? . . . Well, then, listen to me. I may be a magistrate, but I've nothing whatever to do with the police in this case. I'm very dissatisfied, in fact, with the whole way in which they're conducting this case, suppressing important information——"

"'Ush-mongers," Mr. Fishcote summarised.

"Hush-mongers, if you like. Anyhow, I intend to see that they don't get away with it. And if *you've* anything to tell that you weren't allowed to tell, and you'll let me have it, I'll engage to see it doesn't get anywhere it shouldn't—and that you don't get into any trouble."

Mr. Fishcote scratched his head, but said nothing. The word "magistrate" appeared to be troubling him a good deal.

"It'll be you that's defeating the ends of justice," Wylie pressed him, "if you don't tell me what you know. It's no use saying you know something, and then refusing to tell when there's somebody willing to listen. Come now, let's get somewhere quiet where we can talk, and you can tell me all about it. I'll tell you what *I* know, and you'll tell me what *you* know, and that'll be all square, won't it?"

"Orright," grunted Mr. Fishcote, his eyes revolving

meanwhile in the direction of a handsome sign which hung over the street a few doors down. Wylie, with a belated remnant of caution, shook his head firmly.

"No, Fishcote, no," he said, looking him up and down. "You've had quite enough already, my lad, and if you have any more your story won't make sense. I'll stand you a modest little drink when you've told me what I want to know. Now, it's a nice hot day, and if you'll jump into my car I'll run it out into the fields—into the blooming meadows, Fishcote—and we'll have a quiet little chat. Come along, now."

Seated in the blooming meadows, and looking extremely uncomfortable and out of place, Mr. Fishcote told his story. There was not as much in it as Wylie would have liked, but enough to confirm his own suspicions. Mr. Henry George or Harold Bittaford had been lodging with him since May, in a little back street in Teignmouth. And, in one sense, he had certainly lived a retiring life.

"'E didn't 'ave no letters coming," said Mr. Fishcote. "Never anything for 'im by the postman."

"What, no letters *at all*?" Wylie asked.

"I didn't say that. What I said was, no letters comin' to the 'ouse. Course 'e did 'ave some letters—my missus seen 'im a-reading of 'em when she took 'is meals in. But 'e never lef' 'em about—not the envelopes neither."

"Kept 'em locked up somewhere?" Wylie suggested.

"Naw, I don't think 'e did," said Mr. Fishcote, in a tone which suggested that he had the best of reasons for knowing that he did not.

"Where'd he get 'em from, then? Accommodation address, I suppose—shop or something like that. You don't know, do you?"

"I don't *know*," said Mr. Fishcote. "Maybe I could give a guess——"

" Cross the gipsy's palm with silver," Wylie murmured to himself. " I think we'll give that a miss for the moment. Well, what else about him ? I suppose, if he was as shy a bird as you say, he didn't go in for visitors, much ? "

" That's all you know about it ! " Mr. Fishcote said triumphantly. " Shy, not much, he wasn't, not with the ladies, anyway."

It appeared, from a somewhat disconnected narrative punctuated with nods and winks, that the late Mr. Bittaford had possessed a somewhat roving fancy. There was, first of all, a young lady who seemed to be what Mr. Fishcote called " 'is regular." She was employed somewhere in Teignmouth—in a shop, Mr. Fishcote thought it would be, though he deeply regretted having been unable to find out where—and she called herself Miss Smith. " And I've 'eard 'er a-callin' of 'im Phil," said Mr. Fishcote, " though that wasn't any of the names 'e gave me. So when I sees 'is picture in the pipers, I sez, no matter what name you calls yerself in Sawford, you've 'ad another nor what you've got 'ere to my knowledge, so I'll bet you're the same 'ooever you are. So that's why I come along, see ? " This young lady had been in the habit of calling on Mr. Bittaford " most evenings, round about six or maybe a bit later," and had generally stayed a long time. How they occupied themselves during that time Mr. Fishcote, again, regretted that he could not say—Wylie conjectured that the key of Mr. Bittaford's room must have been prudently kept in the door—but he was obviously convinced of the worst.

Miss Smith, however, had never been there during the week-ends, for on most week-ends Mr. Bittaford, without so much as telling any one where he was going or what for, had slipped out—it might be late Saturday or early Sunday morning, and not come back till late

Sunday night. " I've 'eard 'im 'aving a row about it with that Miss Smith, time and again," Mr. Fishcote added ; " she telling 'im it wasn't right 'e should go off like that and never so much as take 'er in the country a bit nor tell 'er 'oo 'e was going to see."

" And what did he say to all that ? "

" ' Business, my dear,' 'e sez, ' business.' Just like that. 'E'd a short enough way with 'im, sometimes, if 'e didn't want to talk."

Nor did this, apparently, exhaust Mr. Bittaford's gallantry, for quite often, during the day, when Miss Smith, it might be supposed, was safe at her place of business, he had been observed to take other girls out, to the pictures, maybe, or to tea, or even to bring them back to his own rooms, though this last he seldom did. " And a wise man, too," thought Wylie, surveying Fishcote with distaste. " 'E liked 'em *fluffy*," said Mr. Fishcote with emphasis. " And not too like a nambone, neither."

" Must have taken a bit of cash, one way and another, squiring all those dames," Wylie reflected. " I wonder where he got it from. He hadn't any job, had he, that you know of ? "

" If 'e 'ad, 'e musta worked it in 'is sleep," Mr. Fishcote said ; " 'cause I never seen 'im do an 'and's turn o' work, not while 'e was in *my* 'ouse. Not even so much as 'elp the missus carry a tray when we was a bit rushed-like. Oh, no, me lord's paid for board and attendance and board and attendance is what 'e's going to 'ave, and on the nail too. Not but what 'e was fair enough in 'is way, and paid up all right what was doo. But I dunno where 'e got 'is cash—'e seemed flush all right, though 'e never was one to spend a lot on a girl. Cheap seats at the pictures in the middle o' the day and a twopenny bus ride's about what 'e'd run to—but some of the girls, give 'em a bar o' lickrice

and they'll lick out of yer 'and. 'E useter do them cross-word puzzles, some time, in the mornings; but I never 'eard of 'im winning nuthin'," he added as an afterthought.

"I see. Then," said Wylie, collecting the points he had gathered, "you know that he called himself Henry George to you, but that he'd used at least one other name besides his own—you never heard what his surname was, I suppose?"

"Naow. *She* allus asked for Mr. George, if she did. Most times she just shoved up without a by-your-leave."

"Right. Well, he came to you on May 9th last, and you don't know where he came from, or what his occupation was or had been."

"Naow."

"And he stayed with you till last Wednesday, never getting any letters openly, nor having any visitors except Miss Smith—did she live in Teignmouth too?"

"I never 'eard, but she musta done, the times she useter leave the 'ouse," said Mr. Fishcote. "There wouldn't be nuthin' running anywheres else. But I betcher anything she knewed 'im before 'e come to Teignmouth, whatever. The way they went on, first time she came, 'd tell you that."

"That doesn't prove anything. He might have been living somewhere else in Teignmouth."

"That 'e wasn't. 'E didn't know where the post office was nor nuthin'. 'Ad to be askin' all the time. Unless 'e was a —— liar," said Mr. Fishcote without enjoyment of his expletive, "'e wasn't."

"Well, he used to have the lady to visit him, and a number of other ladies at odd moments, *and* he generally went away at week-ends, you don't know where."

"That's right."

"By that way," said Wylie, "when he first came to you, had he got a beard?"

"Yus. Same as 'e 'ad when 'e left."

"That's that, then." Wylie sighed as a theory that Mr. Harold Bittaford had fled to Teignmouth to escape the consequences of a crime faded and died. For that would have necessitated the beard's being grown in Teignmouth. "Well, and he left you on Wednesday morning without saying he was going, and left all his things behind—is that so?"

"That's so. Et 'is kipper and walked out as cool as a cucumber. We didn't wait up for 'im, not long. I sez to the missus, 'If me lord thinks as the 'ole 'ouse is going to be lef' open so's 'e can walk in as 'e pleases, well, we'll just let 'im find out it isn't. Let 'im get a window open or go to the coppers, just 'ow 'e likes.' So we locked up and went to bed. But 'e never came, and Saturday morning I sees 'is phiz in the piper. So I popped off."

"Nothing in what he left to tell you who he was."

"Not a bloody thing," said Mr. Fishcote. "Nothing 'e 'ad, bar them cross-word puzzles. But 'e'd lorst 'is watch, some'ow."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I sees 'is cloes in the morchery, and there weren't no watch there. An' 'e'd got it when 'e went 'cos I seen it."

"Fell out of his pocket, most likely."

"That it never. 'E'd got it on a chain wiv a sorter patent catch-like. It wouldn't come off without somebody pulled it. 'E made a great fuss about that watch, and a nice watch it was too."

"What like?"

"Gold," said Mr. Fishcote. "Gold in a case. And it 'ad one o' them big seconds-'ands what goes rahnd and rahnd the ole watch. And a stop-thing for timing And it 'ad two doves and a crown drorn on the back. I'd

know that watch again anywhere, I would. But it wasn't with 'is things."

"Told the police?"

"Not me. After the way I've bin treated, I don't go tellin' them ——s anything I ain't asked. But I've tole *you* all I know," said Mr. Fishcote suggestively, looking at the lengthening shadows. He betrayed no desire to seek a similar confidence from Wylie.

"All right," the latter said. "You've earned your drink and a bit over, I dare say." He felt in his pockets, and then an idea came to him. "Look here, Fishcote, are you open to receive a lodger?"

"Uh?" said Fishcote.

"Well, I suppose you didn't go the length of filling Mr. George's place while you didn't know if he was dead or alive. And I've a fancy to look round in Teignmouth for a bit, and see if I can find out anything more about him. Will you take me for a lodger?" Wylie said.

"Uh?" Mr. Fishcote did not look so pleased as he might have been at acquiring a new and wealthy paying guest. Perhaps he was mentally contrasting the standards of the late Harold Bittaford with the probable requirements of Sir Charles Wylie.

"I'm coming, you know," Wylie said, "so you might as well look pleasant about it. I don't mind paying a bit extra, and all that, you know, if you'll clean my boots decently. Well, what about it?"

"Oh, all right, I s'pose," said Mr. Fishcote. "When'd you be wanting to come, like?"

"To-morrow," said Wylie firmly. "I'll wait till the evening, if you like, to give your old lady a bit of notice, but to-morrow it must be. And I don't want anything cleaned up for me; I want it left just as it is. So off you go in the morning, and mind you don't get so drunk to-night that you can't move—or I'll see

the coppers get a line on you. Come on now, and get your drink."

They went in search of their drink to an unimpressive hostelry half-way between Studleigh and North Sawford. Wylie had refused his companion the expected tip, saying that he did not want Mr. Fishcote to work himself into a condition in which he would let out all his information to the whole tap-room; but that he would, when he had personally superintended the taking of refreshment, provide him with a deposit an account for his rooms. Nevertheless, they found, on arrival at the inn, that their reputation as two of the important witnesses in an interesting case of drowning had preceded them, and that there were a number of persons there who were anxious to hear anything more that there was to be heard. Wylie, who was one of those fortunate persons for whom class-prejudice is practically non-existent, was very happy to drink with all and sundry; but the effort to keep up the friendly atmosphere while emulating the secretiveness of the police was almost more than he could manage, and while he was teaching an appreciative audience the tune and the unexpurgated words of that touching folk-ballad " She Was Poor, But She Was Honest," the landlord looked in and intimated that if they couldn't stop that bloody row in there he'd have them all cleared out. This was a respectable 'ouse, he added, and there was a party having their supper what had been complaining, and no wonder. At which Wylie, with a last effort of sanity, took his companion and himself out of the bar, gave the former a pound note and a series of adjurations, and pushed him off in the right direction before returning himself to Studleigh Pepperton.

CHAPTER XI

THE SLEUTH'S COMPACT

" *Je donnerais Versailles,*
Paris et——
Je donnerais Versailles,
Paris et . . . et . . .
Je donnerais Versailles——
Blast it ! "

It was not clear whether it was the tune or the words which were presenting the greatest difficulty to the singer, as he marched with a somewhat uncertain stride up to the entrance of the Golden Lamb, overshot it and collided with the door-post (hence the exclamation) ; and made his way into the parlour, after a short delay caused by searching for the handle on the wrong side of the door. Once inside, he stood swaying in the lighted room, where the remnants of a cold supper still lay on the table, and fumbled vainly for an opening.

" G-good-evening," he said at last. " Blurry—I mean, *nice* evening I jaunted—jus' wanted a little talk—little talk . . ." At this point the supper remnants caught his wandering eye, and he turned suddenly white and made a clutch at his throat. " *Not* ham ! Oh, my God, no ! " He clutched at a chair and half fell into it, making inarticulate noises.

There was a movement behind. " Pff ! Wow ! Wsh ! Look here, you're drowning me ! " Considerably sobered, he raised a damp head and shook it, wriggling in protest as the contents of the water-jug dripped down inside his shirt.

"It's the only thing to do. You'd have been sick in another minute," Dolly Daniells said prosaically. "Cold water does the trick in two twos, when you're like that. Are you all right now? Or would you like me to do it again?"

"Heavens, no! *Peccavi*—I mean, I beg your pardon," said Wylie hastily. He looked round the room again. "That's better—the two tables have joined up. Always dashed inconvenient, having two tables—never know which one to hold on to. Finished your supper? Good. I wanted to have a bit of a chat with you, my girl, about one or two things. . . . What's up with him?" with a glance at Ronald, who lay sprawled on the horse-hair sofa, glaring into the room—whether because he resented the intruder or because the unshaded light was shining right into his eyes, Wylie could not decide.

"Got a nasty head," Dolly replied. "And no wonder. He ought to be in bed now by rights; but he won't go. So cut it short, if you don't mind."

"I'll cut it as short as I can," Wylie said, not too amiably; "but it's important. See here—I was certain, this morning, when that fool Martindale"—Ronald made an indignant noise—"when he wouldn't let me speak, that there was something fishy about this show, something the police were trying to hush up, and now I'm surer of it than ever. Because—do you know what I've been doing, all this afternoon? I've been talking to the chap called Fishcote, at whose house Mr. Harold Bittaford lodged——"

"It was *Percy*," Ronald interrupted.

"Oh, all right, have it your own way," Wylie said impatiently. "Percy or Harold it's all one to me. Anyway, he lodged with this Fishcote fellow—I suppose you're not disputing that, by any chance?" But Ronald had lapsed into a sulky silence. "And he seems

to have led a jolly fishy sort of life, while he was there, according to Fishcote." He began to give a shortened and slightly bowdlerised version of Mr. Fishcote's story, but was interrupted by a sudden burst of anger from the boy on the couch.

"He didn't! Uncle Percy never did anything like that!"

"Well, it wasn't I said he was Percy. You did that," Wylie remarked reasonably. "Whoever he was, that's what he did, and——" But Ronald was not to be silenced.

"It's nonsense! It's rotten lies!" he exclaimed, half-starting to his feet with bright angry eyes in a white face, and looking almost as though he would have made a violent assault on Wylie. A second later, however, he dropped back, with a sound half-way between a cry and a moan, and pressed his hands to his forehead, shivering. Immediately Dolly was at his side.

"There, you silly chump! What's it all about?" pulling his hands away and stroking his head. "Nobody's doing anything to you. You lie down and take it quietly and don't shout. There, there."

"Make *him* go away, then. What's he want, coming and saying things like that?" Ronald muttered. "Oo! It hurts!" Like a child, he ducked his head and rubbed it protestingly against one of Dolly's hands, while holding the other in his own.

"He won't be long, darling. He'll go in a minute. Just you lie quiet and don't bother to listen," Dolly said, fixing the guest with an expression of which the intent was clear. Discomfited, but refusing to give in, Wylie repeated, in more guarded language, the gist of what he had learned, including, in an afterthought, the disappearance of Mr. George's or Bittaford's watch.

"Gold, d'you say it was?" Dolly interrupted at this point.

"Gold," he said. "And a pretty good one, too, according to his description."

"Ask him what he did with it?"

"What who did?"

"Why, Fishcotes of course." Wylie stared. "Why, isn't it as plain as the nose on your face? Fishcotes pinched it, and chucked him in the water."

"And shaved him, and came along to identify afterwards? Not on your life. Even if the shaving made sense—which it doesn't—he hadn't got the guts to do it. I doubt if he'd pinch anything as big as a gold watch, let alone murder," Wylie said.

"Well, if he didn't, *somebody* did," Dolly argued. Getting interested, she moved her hand from Ronald's, and leant towards the table. "Look here, it's all okay—you don't need to go making a song about it. If that watch's all you say and it's gone, stands to reason somebody pinched it off him, and drowned him, so's not to be caught. Or maybe they had a fight, and he got shoved in."

"And then got shaved, afterwards?" Wylie persisted. "You've got to account for that shaving, somehow."

"Oh, well, p'r'aps he shaved himself."

"After he was dead?"

"Why not before? Oh, yes, I know what you said about the way he did it, but he might have done it badly, mightn't he? What I mean, you haven't ever seen a man that had just shaved off a whole beard, have you?" Wylie thought, and agreed that he had not. "Well, then, he might have made no end of a mess of himself."

"Well, supposing he did shave it off himself," said Wylie, giving up the point momentarily; "what did

he do it for? I suppose, so that nobody should know him. But why? What's the point? Was he running away from all those complications in Teignmouth? He's a mysterious bloke, anyway, and I want to know more about it, whether the police do or not. And, hang it all, he didn't *jump* into the water, did he?"

"Well, he might have. If he was in a hole, like you say."

"*And* shaved his beard first? Have some sense, girl; if you were going to commit suicide you wouldn't go to all that trouble. You can't make that beard fit into suicide or accident, however much you try. Even if your idea about the watch is right, *that* meant thas somebody chucked him in—and I want to know more about it. I'm on the bench," said Wylie, who had never attached so much importance to that fact as during the past twenty-four hours, "and I don't intend that people should throw bodies into the water on my property and get away with it!"

"Well, what about it, then?"

"I'm going to find out about it—if I can. And I want you to help me."

"Excuse me, Miss Daniels, I'm sure. I just came round to see—— Why, *Ronny*! What's the matter with Ronny? What've you been *doing*?" Unperceived by the two interested talkers, Mrs. Caroline Bittaford had entered the room, cast a glance of embarrassment and meaning at Wylie and the girl, and then made a bee-line for the sofa, where Ronald lay quite still, having unexpectedly and inconsiderately fainted.

Then there was a hullabaloo. Full of vicarious maternity, Mrs. Bittaford chafed the boy's hands, and declared that he was feverish and must be put to bed

at once. She sent Dolly in search of hot-water bottles, and Wylie to find a doctor, while she herself summoned the landlord for a consultation about the preparing of hot drinks. "And then you'll come right home with me to-morrow, my poor boy," Wylie heard her saying as he made ready to depart, "and be properly looked after and get a bit of decent cooked food for a change! Excuse me, sir," to Wylie, "but would you mind hurrying? The way people go to bed in these places, you wouldn't believe; and a doctor you've had to get out of bed isn't ever any use, not in my opinion!"

"I *must* talk to you again," Wylie said desperately, detaining Dolly by the hand. "Look here, come out and have some coffee with me to-morrow—at that tea-shop up there—eleven o'clock, shall we say? You *must*, or I'll turn up here at breakfast time, no matter what anybody thinks. Right—ten-thirty, if you like. Don't forget. Yes, Mrs. Bittaford! I'm going at once." He went out into the night.

. . . . . .

"Well, how's your young man?" he asked next morning. Dolly, who looked paler and a little worried, frowned uncertainly.

"Oh—I don't know. He's queerish, he's got a bit of a chill and a bit of a temperature, but he isn't *bad*, not what you'd call bad. Only he keeps worrying and fussing. *I* don't know"

"He's had a bad shock," Wylie reminded her. "And got all worked up about it. I expect he'll be all right directly."

"Uh." Dolly looked doubtful. "She wants to take him back to Yeovil right away, to-day or to-morrow, and fuss over him."

"Well, why not? I don't suppose a bit of petting

would do him any harm. And she seems a comfortable enough sort of body."

"Oh, she's all right. I don't mind her," said Dolly without enthusiasm. "But *he* won't go, not without I come too."

"Well, why not? Or won't she have you?"

"The queer thing is," Dolly said, "that she will. I'd have thought she'd have thrown a fit, seeing Ron and I've been going about together the way we have. I know any of my aunties would, and I can see she thinks I'm no better than I should be, by the look in her eye. But she doesn't seem to care whether I am or not—anyway, if Ron won't come without me, she'll have me too, and lump it. But Mr. Dawes—he's quite another pair of shoes."

"What business is it of his, anyway?"

"Oh, well, he was Uncle Percy's partner, and it seems he owns half the garage now Uncle Percy's dead, and the way he talks you'd think he owned the whole. And the way he looks at me—Scarlet Woman isn't in it. He hasn't actually said I mustn't come, but I think he and Auntie Caroline had a bit of a row about it, this morning; and he's only just waiting a chance to tell me off about my sins And if I got to Yeovil it'll be a nice chance for him, won't it? Anyway, I ask you—do you *see* me in their place, with all those holy Moseses or whatever you call them sitting around, and Mr. Dawes praying? Ron's clean scared of him too, keeps on saying, 'He's got a beard!' as if he couldn't have a beard if he likes, without there being all that fuss about it. It's the praying gets me. Dad's brother-in-law got taken that way, and he prayed over the milk when it turned. Dad's sister left him; she couldn't stand having religion for breakfast—turned her stomach, she said, and I don't blame her. What would I *do*, I ask you?"

"Help me," said Wylie promptly. "Find out about this affair."

"What, in Yeovil? What are you talking about? It didn't happen in Yeovil, whatever it was."

"It may be connected with Yeovil, for all that," Wylie said. "Because, after all, Percy was Harold's brother, and Percy lived in Yeovil. There's pretty well bound to be something one could find out in Yeovil—something that would throw light on why Harold was killed. You do agree with me that he *was* killed, don't you?"

"Seems so," Dolly agreed a little doubtfully.

"Well, then, whoever he was—I mean, *what*ever he was—it seems to me that people ought not to be able to go killing him and get away with it. And as the police don't seem to be doing a thing about it, it's up to you and me to get on with the job. See here, I was thinking a lot about this, last night; and it seems to me that what we ought to do is something of this sort." Rapidly Wylie outlined his plan of campaign. He, as already arranged, was to go to Teignmouth, to occupy the rooms vacated by the late Harold Bittaford, and there, if possible, to reconstruct the cause and possibly the antecedents of his death, finding out why he passed under a false name, what he was doing in Teignmouth, seeing as many as possible of the ladies with whom he went about, searching his rooms for further information, and prying as closely as possible into the activities of Mr. Fishcote. "I agree with you," he said, "that Fishcote's a bad hat, and might easily have been mixed up in some game or other; only I don't think he's capable of murder. But if I'm on the spot, I'll be much more likely to find out what he *is* capable of—and what he's been doing."

As to Dolly, his idea was that she should accompany her fiancé to Yeovil, and from thence report on the

Bittaford ménage, on the opinion generally held of Mr. Harold Bittaford (and Percy, if necessary), on the sort of man he was and the sort of job he had, and generally, on anything that would suggest a reason for his (*a*) being in hiding and (*b*) having been murdered. " Of course, Wylie concluded, " you *may* be right, and he may just have been bumped off for his watch. I'd take that all right, if it wasn't clear that there was something shady about him, and that he was hiding in Teignmouth. Why else have no letters, and be visited by a girl who calls you ' Phil '? And where did he get his cash from? I don't mean you ought to ask that sort of question straight out, but if you could get a general line on what sort of people the Bittafords are—were—who they mix with, what they do, and so on, it would be a great help, as well as anything definite you can find out. I want to get the hang of the thing—I haven't got it at present. I want you to *tell* me about Yeovil, as if it was an undiscovered country—write me travel letters, I mean, about the local fauna and flora. See? "

Dolly gave a giggle. " You don't know what my spelling's like," she observed, " or you wouldn't ask me to write letters."

" Spelling be blowed. I can't spell myself. You've got a ' seeing eye,' and that's what I want. Will you do it? Dash it, you can look after your young man at the same time, can't you? "

" Auntie Caroline'll do that a lot better," Dolly observed. " I don't know what to do with people that are half-sick and half-dithering. I can do with 'em when they're real sick, but that's about all. Well "—she hesitated a little—" I don't mind if I do. It'd be something to do, anyway, and that's what I want. I'd like, to tell you the truth, to keep a bit of an eye on Ron —to keep that old image from praying him into fits, anyway; but I can't stand sticking about doing

nothing. Only, mind you, you'll have to put up with what you can get. I never was much of a hand at writing. And I don't suppose I'll find out anything for you, anyway."

"That's all right. I'll trust you to find out what's going," said Wylie happily. "Have another cream bun? Well, cheerio. Don't be too long writing; I'll be waiting to hear from you."

PART II

AMATEURS ON THE TRAIL

CHAPTER XII

LETTERS AND SUSPECTS

"DEAR SIR CHARLES WYLIE"—the letter began—"I don't know exactly what it was you expected me to find out, and, anyway, I don't think I've found out anytning at all. But you asked me to write all about it, so here goes, and you mustn't mind grammar or spelling because as I told you I can't do either.

"This is a funny sort of place and a funny sort of house altogether. It's oldish, I should think, anyway, it's just next to the yard which they've made the garage out of, and Auntie Caroline says it oughtn't to be, they ought to live away from it somewhere and if she were gentry she would. But she doesn't seem to mind much so long as things are comfortable. I think she's a nice sort of old girl really, and she's quite matey when she isn't getting religion or sniffing about Percy.

"She lives in the house, which is bigger than you'd think, and Ron has a nice kind of room at the back, where she tries to make him stop in bed all day, and I have a little sort of cupboard place in between. Then there're two more rooms built out over the garage where Mr. Dawes lives, only the door between's locked, so he doesn't actually live in the house. But he does as near as no matter; he has all his meals there and says grace to every one till you'd think God'd get sick of hearing it, and he's about most of the time, in and out of the garage like a great black crow. There's another fellow has his dinner with us, called Tom Edwards, who's foreman or something at the garage. He's a great big thing with a face like a plate and a lot of red hair.

I think he's loony, myself; he drops all his food about and jumps if you speak to him, but it may be just that he's sweet on Caroline. Because he *is*, whatever anybody may say; he looks at her all the time when he thinks she isn't looking, and if she speaks he jumps farther than he does for any one else. In between he makes faces at Mr. Dawes, I think because he's fed up with Mr. Dawes having all his meals here and him only having dinner; Mr. Dawes doesn't take any notice of him at all. I don't think he's so bad, if he *is* a bit batty; he talks to Ron sometimes and Ron likes him. Ron's better, only he's queer and moony, and gets the shivers sometimes. But you don't want to know about that.

"There's a good lot of people come here one way and another. Most of them are funny old geezers who've got something to do with the chapel. I didn't go to meeting there, by the way. I just couldn't face it. I'd get the giggles if they all started jumping about the way Ron says. So I stayed at home, and Ron did too because he wasn't supposed to be well enough and Tom Edwards came in suddenly and talked to us for a bit. And I'll tell you about that in a minute, because that's all that you might call news I've got for you.

"I don't know the names of all the people who come because I never do know anybody's name, but there's a Mr. and Mrs. Cole who've been quite a few times, and a proper pair of old images they are too. I don't know if he's the preacher or the man that takes the plate round, but he's something they all think a lot of, anyway. And her, you should just see her! She's just about four feet each way, I mean four feet tall as well, and she's got a fat stick-out in front like a fat man's. And she's got bright yellow hair which I don't believe she ever brushes and an awful old black hat like a chimney pot that sits right on top of it and shiny black

beads all over her clothes. And a bellow like one of those sea-lion things at the Zoo when they're being fed. He's got the loveliest head you ever saw, like pictures of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob all together, with a long white beard and long white hair that's very thick and curls over his collar, and a lovely straight nose and brownish smooth skin on his face. When you see him sitting down you think goodness me, that's a real church saint and no mistake. And then he gets up and you see his legs are tiny, about as long as hers, and he's really no bigger than I am, and his beard looks as if it would be tickling his knees all the time, and he just looks an old comic. And he's got a little squeaky voice like a young pig's.

" Anyway, the first time they came they both turned up in black, and he had a crêpe band on his arm, and they sat there looking like a funeral all through supper and hardly said a word. And then he suddenly stopped as he was taking the cheese, and squeaked out, with the cheese still in the air, ' And what sort of end ? ' Caroline said, ' What ? Whose end ?' And he said, ' Your dear brother-in-law. I trust he died in the consciousness of his sins ; ' and Caroline gave a sort of squeal and began to snivel, and Mr. Dawes said, ' We do not know, brother. We were not there when he died.' And Mrs. Cole roared, ' You ought to have *asked* ! What were you thinking of, Elisha Dawes, not to ask ? ' And then they began to have a wrangle all about whether you could find out whether a corpse nobody'd seen before had died in its sins or not, silliest thing I'd ever heard ; and then Mrs. Cole said, ' Samuel ! At least we can *pray*.' And they all started praying again like they did in Studleigh for ' the soul of thy servant, Harold Bittaford.' And Ron, the cuckoo, said, ' Percy ! ' the way he always does if anybody says Harold, like saying Snap ; and Mr. Cole squeaked,

'But, surely, dear sister, Percy died in the Lord's hands, did he not?' And Caroline gave a sort of howl and said, 'I don't know! I don't know!' and burst out crying, and Mr. Dawes looked very black and said, 'Of course he did.'

"Then they all began to talk about Percy's last hours, except Caroline, who was all waterworks. It seems the old Coles were åway when it happened, and they didn't mean to be done out of any of the fun. But I don't think they got much for their money, because Percy died at Sands-on-Sea, in his sleep, and doesn't seem to have thought of telling anybody about his soul. He had cancer, poor chap, if that's any good to you, and really died of an overdose of morphia, so I can't see that whatever he said just before would have been much good to anybody, for my aunty died that way, and she was pretty stupid with it long before she died. However, it seems Percy was a bit of a backslider or anyway not properly saved according to *their* lights, so they were all very anxious to know what his prospects were, so to speak; and old Ma Cole particularly wanted to know what he was doing at Sands-on-Sea, which she seems to think is a kind of Sodom and Gomorrah. Only if he was dying of cancer I shouldn't think he could have been much on the razzle, should you? Mr. Dawes just said, 'He went there to end his days,' which *does* seem a bit of a queer taste if you know Sands-on-Sea; but I can't see why the poor thing shouldn't have been allowed to do as he felt like without all that fuss, can you? Anyway, Harold was with him all the time, so he can't have been coming to much harm. Perhaps he felt he'd like to die where Mr. and Mrs. Cole couldn't get at him; I'm sure I should. Anyway, it ended in us all praying for Percy's soul too, just to be on the safe side, and I'm sure I hope he's the better for it.

"I really don't know why I've written all this stuff

about the Coles. I'm sure it can't be any use to you; only you did tell me to write about what the place and the people were like, and the Coles are more like it than anything else, if you know what I mean. Otherwise, it's just a garage and repair place, which seems to do quite a lot of business, as far as I can see, and Tom Edwards says they're thinking of opening a place in Northampton as well. He's pretty sick about it, I can see that, though he doesn't say much; I suppose because they'd probably send him to Northampton to look after it and then he wouldn't be able to make goo-goo eyes at Caroline even once a day. I heard him growl to one of the boys at the garage when he didn't think any one was listening, 'If he tries to send me I'll break his neck for him.' I suppose it was Mr. Dawes he meant, and I think he could do it, though he isn't as big, because he's got those great long arms like a chimp, and, anyway, these loony boys are nearly always as strong as horses.

"The bother is that I can't find out anything about what you wanted me to find out about, because nobody knows anything, and nobody's ever seen Harold here. He's never lived in Yeovil; he and his brothers came first from somewhere in the Midlands; Ron says Stourbridge and Caroline says Coventry, and Tom Edwards doesn't know, so you can take your choice. And then Harold went to Australia and nobody ever heard of him till he wrote to Percy to say he was coming home. At least, I suppose he wrote to Percy in between whiles to say he wasn't dead; but nobody *here* ever heard anything about him. But the funny thing is that when he *did* write he never came here at all, but Percy went and met him in London, and then they went off together, I don't know where, but they got to Sands-on-Sea in the end, and then Percy went and died. I suppose he probably had cancer when Harold came, because it

takes some time to kill you, doesn't it?—and that was why he stopped working.

"I got all this from Tom Edwards, that Sunday I told you about. I didn't like to ask Caroline too much, because she turns on the waterworks if you talk about either Percy or Harold and, anyway, it's rude. And I daren't ask Mr. Dawes because I'm afraid he'd begin to pray. But Tom Edwards knew all about it; he'd heard that Harold was coming, and then that Percy was going to meet him and stay away for a bit because he was ill. And, if you ask me, I think it suited Tom A1 to have Percy away; at least, that's what he sounded like, when he talked about how pleased he was that Harold hadn't ever come into the business after all. I asked him why and he said with two of them it would have gone to pot in no time. He thinks Percy was no good, fooled around and wasted his time and was letting the business go all downhill, and he's certain Harold would have been the same; he thinks Mr. Dawes is a good business man, though he doesn't like him. Only he doesn't seem to like anybody to speak of, so that doesn't go for much. He says Mr. Cole's a blanky old fraud, never does a stroke of work but makes the chapel keep him, and Mrs. Cole's a nigger-driver and an old miser. I forgot to say Mr. Cole's a monumental mason, so he must make the chapel keep him in tombstones. Only I don't suppose he killed Harold to get a tombstone out of it, do you? I asked Tom why Harold didn't come back into the business after Percy died, and he said he didn't know, but it was a jolly good thing he didn't, and, anyway, it wasn't anything to do with him, it belonged to Caroline and Mr. Dawes. So there it is. I don't think there's anything to help you at all, is there?—because you want to find out about Harold, and if he never came here there isn't anything much anybody can find out, is there?

"Goodness me, what a letter! I've never written such a long one in my life, so I hope you'll put up with it. I hope you're getting on all right, because I don't want to have to stay in this hole much longer. It's funny in a way if you take it right and don't let it get your goat, but I'd leave to-morrow if I'd nothing to stay for and if Ron wasn't still so dicky.

"Yours sincerely,

"DOROTHY DANIELLS."

Dolly's script was large and unformed, and what with second thoughts and erasures her letter occupied a great many sheets of paper and took a considerable time to read. Wylie chuckled occasionally as he read it, particularly at the description of Mr. and Mrs. Cole, but at the end he pushed it aside with something of a sigh, and stared gloomily round the sitting-room of the late Mr. Bittaford.

He was not feeling in an optimistic mood at the moment. So far, the week of his sojourn in Teignmouth had yielded him nothing but discomfort. Mr. Bittaford's rooms were as bare as, though not as clean as a whistle, and there was nothing, not even a scrap of paper, which threw the faintest light upon either his previous activities or the manner of his death. From the nervous way in which the eyes of Mr. Fishcote (who seemed as unoccupied, in general, as Mr. Bittaford had been) followed his searchings, Wylie felt pretty confident that there had been some property which Mr. Fishcote had disposed of; but in face of the man's flat denials he could not obtain any further help. He was not equal, he found, to bullying even Mr. Fishcote out of a lie; and this fact depressed his spirits.

He was no less depressed by the habits of Mr. Fishcote's partner. Mrs. Sarah Fishcote was amiable, but she was a dirty slatternly fool; and her amiability was of

that irritating, bovine quality which so often goes with imbecility. She was incapable of making a bed so that it did not come unmade at the first opportunity, or of cleaning a room so as to remove instead of scattering the dust, or of boiling an egg so that it was neither as hard as a brick nor completely liquescent; and attempts to improve the service which she provided only resulted in worse confusion. Mr. Bittaford, whatever he was, could not have been particular.

Attempts to find "Miss Smith" had met with no success whatever. In the absence of any clue, other than the vague word "shop" to "Miss Smith's" employment, Wylie had hoped that, if he sat tight and kept a spider-like watch in Mr. Bittaford's rooms, portions of the latter's past would come walking into his web—Miss Smith, at the very least, or some of the minor young women whom Bittaford entertained in his off-hours, or the unknown persons with whom he consorted at his week-ends. But so far nobody had turned up at all. It was true that, according to Mr. Fishcote, none of the parties except Miss Smith had ever put in an appearance at the house, and that Miss Smith herself had not been there for a week or ten days before Bittaford's departure; but it was inconsiderate, at the least, of the young woman to disappear as well. Even if she had heard he was dead, Wylie thought wrathfully, she might have had the proper sentiment to call at his lodgings. Or she might have let Fishcote have her address. "Damn the rat! Why can't he spy to some purpose, instead of sniffing round at *my* heels?"

And now came this letter, entertaining enough, no doubt, but containing nothing which was likely to prove of the slightest help to him. In fact, he thought as he rapidly glanced through it again, absolutely the only new facts we've got by that are that Harold

Bittaford never was in Yeovil, and that he was at Sands-on-Sea when Percy died. Oh, and that Percy died of cancer—though I think I've heard that before somewhere. It looks as though I'd have to go to Sands-on-Sea—damn it, what a hole!—if I want to get any news of Harold, though they're not likely to know much about him there, if he was just a chance visitor. Anyway, they could tell me that he existed, I suppose, which nobody seems to know in the place where they ought to—if he did exist, and hasn't been invented. By jove, though, is that a possibility—there doesn't seem much proof of him, by all accounts. Suppose he's a myth—no, blast it, he's dead, so he must have existed. And there was too much of a family likeness, by all accounts, for him to have been somebody else—somebody quite different—even if that helped at all. I don't want a third person in, anyway; here are Harold and Percy, and they're both dead, and that's enough to go on with. But who the deuce killed them—at least, who killed Harold? Percy died of cancer. By jove, though, I wonder——

At this point Wylie, as though bitten by a sudden idea, sprang up and began to pace the room. At the second turn, his pacing brought him to the window; he looked casually out, and stopped short. Immediately opposite the house was a little alley between the other houses, and in that alley was a man who could only be described as "lurking." In the shadow of the house wall he was standing half-crouched, and his eyes, as far as Wylie could make out, were fixed firmly upon his own sitting-room. Wylie made a movement to pull up the sash, and immediately the man came out of the alley and stood on the pavement—a fair young fellow looking like a clerk or a mechanic. Wylie flung open the window and leaned out; the man looked up, and instantly his jaw dropped in an expression of blank

astonishment, and he scuttled like a rabbit back into his alley.

"Hallo! hallo! What's all this?" said Wylie to himself, and on a rapid impulse dashed downstairs, across the road and into the mouth of the alley. A dark figure was silhouetted against the light at the other end. "Hi!" shouted Wylie. "Hi! Come here a minute!" The figure leaped forward; so did Wylie, and his legs were the longer, and his wind, in spite of his potatory habits, still good enough for a short sprint. Had the alleyway led into a main road the pursuit might have been checked, but it led only into a still less distinguished part of the back quarters of Teignmouth, where no obstacles were to be seen, and before the quarry was out of it again Wylie was upon him and had him by the collar.

"Now, then, what's all this?" he said, scanning his captive, who was a pleasant-faced young fellow, if a trifle weak in the chin. "What were you staring up at me for?"

"That's no crime, staring," the young man retorted.

"I didn't say it was a crime. I asked why you were doing it. I don't like being stared at; it makes me nervous. If you're going on staring at me you've got to give a reason," said Wylie, amused.

"I'm not going on staring at you," the captive replied. "I've seen you enough."

Wylie looked at him for a surprised moment, and then decided that this was a genuine statement of fact and not a schoolboy retort.

"As you haven't seen me at all, my dear chap," he remarked, "except for a single glimpse out of a window, I'm forced to conclude that you don't really want to study my physiognomy—in fact, that you didn't come there to stare at me at all, but at somebody quite different." The shoulders under the coat jerked slightly.

" No, wait a minute. Did you come to see Mr. Henry George, or didn't you ? " The young man said nothing. " I suppose you know he's dead, by the way ? "

" What ! What d'you mean ? " The young man's jaw dropped, and his eyes started nearly out of his head.

" He's dead. Drowned. Don't you see the papers ? Here, my good fellow, hold up ! " For the young man, with a muttered whisper of, " Jesus ! that's torn it," had slumped forward in Wylie's grasp almost as if he was going to faint. " What's the matter ? "

" N-nothing. Let me go, damn you. It's nothing to do with you," the young man said.

" It is. It's damn all to do with me. Here, I want to talk to you. Come back to the digs—no, I won't have that sneak-thief listening at the keyhole. Come round the corner somewhere, and have a drink ; you look as if you could do with one, and we'll talk there—what's your name ? "

" *Drowned ?* When ? How ? " said the young man, neither making any move nor taking any notice of the question. Wylie gave him a very brief account of the finding of Bittaford's body, at which he grunted and bit his nails.

" But how on earth did you come not to know it ? " Wylie asked. " It's been all over the papers, *with* his face, as large as life."

" I've bin on my holiday," the young man said. " Went over to Boulong—didn't see no papers. I've only just heard——" he stopped.

" What have you only just heard ? Come on, I want to know how it happened. Can't have unexplained murders lying about, you know," said Wylie.

" Then you can go and chase yourself," said the young man, who seemed to have plucked up his spirits. " *I'm* not going to help you. He was a —— ——, that

fellow was, and he's a sight better dead. Only —— Jesus, what a mess ! "

" What's a mess ? Look here, I've told you I'm not the police. You needn't be scared, I'm not going to give you away. What sort of a mess have you got into ? "

" Not me," the young man muttered. " Me sister."

" Oh ! Miss Smith ? " Wylie said, drawing a bow at a venture, and saw by the twitch of the hands that the shot had gone home. He stood still for a minute, thinking out the implications and watching the white, anxious face beside him. When he spoke again it was in a much gentler tone. " Look here," he said, " I can guess what this means, can't I ? . . . Well, will you believe that I don't want to hurt you or your sister at all I've nothing to do with the police ; I needn't tell anybody anything unless I want to. If you'll tell me just what happened, in your own way and at your own time, I'll promise to do all I can to help—if there's anything to be done. Is that a bargain ? What's your name, by the way ? " seeing the young man inclined to yield.

" Lane. Victor Lane."

" And your sister's ? "

" Violet."

" Thanks. Well ? " After a little more persuasion, Victor Lane, who was obviously deeply perturbed, agreed to the suggestion, and in the quiet corner of a neighbouring pub he told his story.

It was very much as Wylie had conjectured. Violet Lane, who, as her brother fiercely insisted, was always " a good girl," had taken up with Bittaford some time ago, and had gradually become more and more infatuated with him. The long and the short of it was that she was now going to become a mother, and about a fortnight previously had fainted at her work and been dismissed, after a doctor had been called. She had been afraid to tell Bittaford, whom she suspected anyhow of cooling

off, and after a few days spent in miserably looking for other work had written to her brother, who was her only living relative, asking for help. " Vi'd never have done that if she hadn't been plumb scared," Victor added. " She's never been the girl to come crying to other folk for help." Victor, who was in France at the time, had not got the letter till the day before, when he rushed straight off to his sister's lodgings, found that she had left them, and, distracted with nightmares of the river dancing before his mind, had gone off to " Mr. George's " rooms, determined to hang about till he found him. Why he should have lurked in the alleyway instead of calling direct upon the villain of the piece he did not explain, and Wylie did not ask him, thinking that his slightly melodramatic state of mind was quite sufficient to explain it. However, there the story was. It did not endear Harold Bittaford to his avenger.

" Your sister knew him some time before," he said. " Where ? Not here, was it ? "

" No ; she met him somewhere on her holiday, dunno where, a few months ago. Oh, he was properly gone on her, all right, for a bit," Victor Lane said savagely. " Came to Teignmouth just so's to be near her. I thought there was something fishy in the wind, but she never told me anything. We don't see such a lot of each other," he added in explanation " We've got our own friends and so on."

" Why did she call him Phil ? " Wylie asked. " At least, Fishcote said she did."

" Why, because it was his name. Phil Brown, she said her boy-friend was."

" He wasn't, though," Wylie said. " His name was Harold Bittaford," Lane gasped. " Well, he'd got two names, anyhow. You knew that. Why not three ? "

" I told her he was a crook," Lane said. " I said, no decent fellow'd need to be going about under a wrong

name. But she wouldn't listen, said it was all my dirty mind, and she was sorry she'd told me. I bet she's sorry enough herself, now, poor kid. Oh, Lord!" as his mind went back to his anxieties. "What the hell's become of her?"

"Buck up," said Wylie cheerfully. "You don't have to jump to conclusions. From all you've said, it doesn't seem to me that you've had much of a look for her, yet. Come on and let's try, shall we?"

They went on, and they tried; and Wylie's determination aided by Wylie's pocket speedily produced results. Miss Violet Lane's landlady had, it is true, been instructed not to disclose the address to which Miss Violet Lane had removed, but she was of the type for whom no instruction and no promise is stronger than a ten-shilling note, and a very moderate persuasion of that kind speedily produced the desired information. To the new address, accordingly, the two repaired, and there found that Miss Lane was living and would, indeed, be back within a few minutes. Wylie waited for her return becoming thereby the witness of a touching reconciliation scene between brother and sister, to which his promise of financial assistance, made to the former while waiting, contributed not immaterially. After this was over, he tried, though feeling somewhat embarrassed, to extract a little further information from the sister, but drew an almost complete blank. Philip Brown, he confirmed, was the name under which the charmer had passed; and he had told Miss Lane that he was a cinema producer and film renter (she did not appear to have noticed the difficulty of combining both occupations), and that he was living on the proceeds of his last big hit while making preparations for the next. Asked about his use of a false name in Teignmouth she explained that he had had more than one *alias*, at different places. She added that he had not wished to go under his own name for

fear of undesirable publicity, which might have spoiled the chances of the next coup; and left Wylie gasping, not for the first time, at the gullibility of some women. Violet Lane did not look an utter fool; he was quite willing, indeed, to believe that she was effective enough at her own job and could detect a false half-crown or a bilking customer as well as the next. But she seemed to have swallowed without the faintest effort a story which Mr. Fishcote, to take no higher a specimen of humanity, would have seen through in an instant. Pulling himself together, he tried to fix the dates of her association with Bittaford, but could not get them exactly, except that it began "some time in March," when she had her holiday and met him on the pier at Burnham-on-Sea. Thereafter they had met frequently, sometimes at Burnham and sometimes elsewhere, until, in fear partly at the effect on others of these constant absences and partly for her own future, she had decided to meet him no more. But within the week he had followed her to Teignmouth and taken up his quarters with the Fishcotes. The rest he knew; she had written to her brother before the news was in the papers, when she only felt certain in her own mind, having watched Bittaford's behaviour and having also received certain dark hints from other quarters, that he was going to leave her in the lurch. Victor's silence, followed by Bittaford's death, had left her without hope, and—and—whatever was she to do now? Here, for the first time, she dissolved into tears, and Wylie found himself under the necessity of implementing some of his rash promises before he thought he could safely depart. Victor Lane might or might not have been equal to giving a seducer a thrashing and a piece of his mind; he clearly was not in the least equal to coping with a situation which presented financial difficulties; and both brother and sister threw themselves on Wylie's mercy in a way which

might have been called touching or brazen, according to how you chose to look at it. Eventually, after administering consolation of various kinds, he got away, feeling that except in the knowledge of human frailty he was not much wiser.

As he came out of the dingy street which was Violet Lane's new home and turned into something wider, he saw preceding him a broad back and shoulders which struck him as faintly familiar. He quickened his pace to pass it, looked back, and found himself gazing into the long wooden face of Detective-Sergeant Edgeworth.

"Hallo!" said Wylie, considerably disconcerted. "What are *you* doing here?"

"Good-evening, Sir Charles. I'm having a bit of a look round," Edgeworth replied.

"Oh! Just sampling the pleasures of Teignmouth, I suppose," said Wylie with heavy sarcasm.

"That's so," agreed the sergeant. "You having a good holiday, I hope, Sir Charles."

"Oh, hellish good!" returned Wylie savagely. "How's Bittaford's murderer getting along?" The sergeant's face expressed nothing but surprise. "You don't kid me," Wylie said, "that you people are poking about Teignmouth, where he lived, just for the fun of a seaside holiday. What have you been digging up?"

"I couldn't say, Sir Charles, I'm sure," said the sergeant. "I've just orders to come to Teignmouth and look around, like. There's some bits of information headquarters wants, but whether it's anything to do with what you've in mind or not I'm sure I couldn't say. Excuse me, that's my bus." He leapt on it with surprising agility.

"Meaning you *won't* say, you wooden-headed old blighter!" Wylie commented crossly, as he returned to his own rooms. "Never mind," he added more cheerfully. "That means, anyhow, that the cops *do* think

there's something funny about the thing, or they wouldn't be here. And as I've had a week's start of them I ought to be able to get the goods over them. Hang it, though, I wish I'd got a bit more goods to start with."

He reviewed his stock of information gained. First, Harold Bittaford had an excellent reason for disappearing from Teignmouth. ("But not for drowning himself; that would be a bit drastic, for that sort of chap.") Secondly, he was a thoroughly shady character and was lying very low, or why all those *aliases*? ("But why was he hiding?") What crime could he have committed? For surely it must be something which brought him within reach of the law. Why. . . . Why. . . . Abruptly Wylie's mind reverted to the train of thought which Violet Lane's appearance had interrupted. *Percy* Bittaford had died at Sands-on-Sea, alone, apparently, with his crook brother. True, he was said to have died of cancer—but was that quite certain? His acquaintances in Yeovil, it seemed, had not known that he was ill, before he went to join Harold. Did he really die of cancer? Did any one know that for certain? And, anyway, hadn't Dolly said that he really died of morphine poisoning? Well, at least that was one line of inquiry. Sands-on-Sea—confound the beastly place—should be his next port of call. He hastily wrote a very brief note to Dolly: "Find out where Percy stayed in Sands-on-Sea, and all about his illness and previous health," was the gist of it; and went to bed chuckling to himself.

"I say!" A sudden thought struck him as he was dropping off to sleep. "That chap this afternoon—he *said* he'd been in France all the time. But suppose he hadn't—suppose he'd really come back quick and met Bittaford——" But he dismissed the supposition. It conflicted with his present line of investigation and therefore could not be entertained.

CHAPTER XIII

THE POLICE CONFER

"HALLO. I expected you back yesterday. Got any news?" asked Inspector Cavanagh of Detective-Sergeant Edgeworth, as the latter reappeared in the North Sawford Police Station. The sergeant shook his head.

"Nothing to speak of," he said. "But—I met Sir Charles Wylie there."

"Wylie! In Teignmouth! What the hell . . . what was he doing there?"

"Living," said the sergeant.

"Living in Teignmouth! Go on! Are you sure?"

"He's living in Fishcote's rooms, where that Bittaford lived," said the sergeant. "That's what made me late. I was just starting for home, when I met him. So I stopped and asked the chaps in Teignmouth, and that's where he's living."

"Well, I'm damned!" said the inspector. "What in thunder is he doing there? I guess there's more in this than meets the eye, eh, Edgeworth?" The sergeant nodded. "*Damn!*" said Inspector Cavanagh with heart-felt emotion, just as the chief constable entered the room.

"Morning, Cavanagh. What's the matter?" Colonel Wyndham said. The inspector looked at the sergeant, and the sergeant looked at the inspector.

"Sir Charles Wylie," the latter said at last, "is living in Teignmouth—at the lodgings where Bittaford used to live."

"Confound it!" Wyndham said, looking at his

subordinates as if he held them responsible. "I suppose he's nosing round about this affair still; I thought he was too quiet to be true. I hope you didn't leave anything there for him to find—if there was anything?"

"Certainly we didn't," said Cavanagh in rather an injured tone. "I sent you a full report on what we found there, sir."

"I know you did," said Wyndham; "but I've only just got back and I haven't had time to read it yet. Give me an idea of it now, there's a good chap. What did you find there? Bugs, I should think, from the look of the lessor."

"No, sir, not bugs," said Cavanagh, answering literally and a little stiffly, in token that he thought his memorandum ought to have met with earlier consideration. "There may have been fleas, but we did not find any. The place was rather dirty, but not very dirty, considering that the tenant had been absent for five days. There were some clothes in the wardrobe and drawers—I think I have a copy of the full list here." He began to look through an ostentatiously tidy drawer.

"No, no! Spare me, my dear fellow. I only want a rough idea. I promise you I'll read every word of it, directly I get home," said Colonel Wyndham with a twinkle. Cavanagh shut the drawer, laughed a small laugh, and continued less woodenly:

"Most of the suits were newish, bought at cheap multiple tailors in London or Exeter. Cheap, flashy stuff—no wear in it. No names in the suits, and no chance of tracing their purchase at those big places, unless anybody happened to remember. Which, to date, they haven't. No marks on underclothes either, except a Teighnmouth laundry mark, but there had been some that had been picked out. Clothes of a chap who was living on the q.t. all right.

"Personal possessions, practically *nil*. Never saw a

man with fewer. A spare pair of cuff-links, a writing-case, and an Edgar Wallace was about as much as it amounted to."

"Letters in the writing-case?"

"Nary a one. Fishcote says he used to burn 'something that looked like letters,' sometimes. But I'll bet my bottom dollar, if there *were* any left about, that Fishcote's got 'em."

"Any evidence of occupation?"

"This—if you can call it evidence." The inspector opened his drawer again and produced a small blue strip of paper, torn from a memorandum pad and bearing a list of names with cabalistic figures, some in pounds shillings and pence. The chief constable examined it with care.

"Betting slip," he said. "Street betting, eh?"

"Yes. *And* regular," the inspector emphasised. "That sheet, as a matter of fact, was torn off a block of the kind that's regularly used by the street-betting crowd hereabouts, comes from one particular stationer. I don't know why they all use it; you'd think they wouldn't want to label themselves. But they do."

"Try it for our friend's finger-prints?"

"Yes. They're there all right. *And* our friend Fishcote's, too."

"Oh! What did *he* say about it?"

"Never seen it, not to remember. Hadn't any idea what it was. But he had," said the inspector.

"How do you know?"

"By his face, mostly. But he's been in that line a longish time now, or supposed to be. He was had up at Teighnmouth Police Court once, about a year ago; but got off for lack of evidence. I haven't much doubt in my own mind that he took Bittaford in as a kind of partner, and knows all about it, anyway. But there's

no proof of it, and, anyway, that's no reason why he should kill the chap."

"Do we think he did?" Colonel Wyndham asked.

"No; at least, I don't. But I don't know who did; and Fishcote, he don't believe in giving the police any more information than he can help."

"He told them he'd got Sir Charles there, anyway," Edgeworth put in. "Saved me a good bit of bother, their knowing."

"He didn't! Now, what on earth did he do that for? What did he say Sir Charles was doing?"

"Nosing around, he told Mr. Peters of Teignmouth, and looking for papers. And he winked. Quite matey he was, Mr. Peters said, almost as though he thought he'd get a tip out of them. And told them Sir Charles didn't want the police to know anything about it."

"Really, Charles is the most Godforsaken fool," Wyndham said, and then checked himself. "Any more news from Sydney?"

"Nothing much, sir," said the inspector. "There's just this The Sydney police have discovered that a fellow called Gayford Tomline, who used to be a friend of Harold Bittaford's and more or less on the same lay, sailed for England about three months after he did."

"And what's the point of that?"

"Just this, sir. What's been one of the difficulties about Bittaford ever since the start is, why did he suddenly decide to go into hiding? You see, he pretty clearly *was* in hiding—false name, letters burnt, marks picked off his clothes, and so on. But he didn't come to England in hiding. He landed in his own name, and stayed at Sands-on-Sea quite openly in his own name That place—Marine View—remembers him quite well—of course they would under the circs. Immediately after he left we can't trace him, we don't know whether he was in hiding then. But we *do* know that by the

time he got to Teignmouth he was very shy indeed, and that's about the time his old pal would have been reaching England. Now, supposing his old pal was on his heels for some reason or other, and suppose he got a warning from somebody in Australia, wouldn't that be a good reason for lying low? And then, if Tomline tracked him down at last——" The inspector clicked his fingers expressively.

"Why shave him, then? That blessed beard gets in the way of every theory," grumbled the colonel.

"Well, sir, supposing it was like this. Supposing this Bittaford had incurred the enmity of several of his old lot in Sydney. Suppose one of them had chased him to England to have it out with him. We don't need necessarily to assume that he'd come here intending to murder him; that may have been an accident—a row working out as it wasn't meant to. But if this Tomline has killed him, however you like, he'll want him to be recognised as Bittaford, won't he? And to be buried under that name, so that the news will appear in the Sydney papers, and his friends out there won't be saying, 'Here, you weren't sent to England to kill a Henry George we'd never heard of.' *You* know how suspicious crooks of any sort are of each other. Well, then, he'd need to shave off that beard, wouldn't he, so that Bittaford could be recognised? It's the only way that I can think of to make sense of that shaving."

"Um-m-m. Perhaps you're right," said the colonel rather doubtfully. "But, you know, there's a good deal of supposing in your idea, Cavanagh. You don't know that Bittaford ever had a quarrel with his Australian friends; you don't know that this Tomline ever set eyes on him in England; as far as I can see, you don't even know that he ever landed at all."

"Oh, yes, sir, I see that," Cavanagh replied. "But we'll get on to it as quick as we can. I've been in touch

with the steamer people already and I ought to hear from them any moment. Then, if Tomline did land, I'll ask Scotland Yard if they can't trace him for us. In the meantime, I've got the Sydney police doing their damnedest to try and find out what Bittaford was doing just before he left, and what were his relations with his associates. As to the rest, I'm afraid we can only go on just pegging away and hope that something will turn up. The Yard say his finger-prints are no good to them."

"That's all right," the colonel agreed. "I wonder," he mused half to himself, "if I hadn't better go to Teignmouth and have a word with Charles. Even if he doesn't mean any direct mischief, the boy's such a damn fool that he's bound to make trouble for himself or us sooner or later."

"If you'd take my advice, sir," said Cavanagh earnestly, "I wouldn't interfere with him. He'll be quite happy in Teignmouth, and there's no possible harm he can do there, we've combed it all too thoroughly."

"I'm sure you have," the colonel said. "All the same, I'm not sure that I won't run over and have a look at him. I can't do any harm, either," he added, with a smile. "But I'll think it over."

But when, after thinking it over, he did go to Teignmouth, on the following day, he found the inspector's diagnosis had been quite at fault. Sir Charles Wylie had gone, and nobody knew where. Mr. Fishcote deeply regretted that he was quite genuinely unable to supply this information.

CHAPTER XIV

DIET AND DETECTION

SIR CHARLES WYLIE had left Teignmouth on the morning of the day following his meeting with the sergeant—had left, indeed, a good deal earlier than he had at first intended, owing to the appearance of Victor Lane in the street below. Wylie realised then that even an hour or two's delay in that city was liable to bind him with hoops of steel to the feckless Lane family; and as he felt little or no interest in either of them, and had no hopes of acquiring any information other than that for which, he considered, he had already paid fairly lavishly, he instructed Mrs. Fishcote to say he was not at home (an instruction which, for once, she carried out without mishap), and proceeded to hurl his possessions into his bags and call for his bill.

"You're never goin' off right away like that, sir," said Mrs. Fishcote, hovering around him anxiously and breathing hard down the back of his neck. Fishcote having wandered out on his own avocations, her natural feelings of kindliness had full play, and she was, subconsciously, a little worried about the adequacy of her hospitality to Wylie's probable standards. "Why, you'll be 'arf starved; you didn't 'ardly heat any breakfast. Just let me put you up a nice little bit of 'am sandwich, now; I won't be two twos. I got quite a nice little bit of 'am."

"No, thank you," said Wylie, with a shudder. The nice bit of 'am had already put in an appearance that day, and was largely responsible for his failure to 'heat' any breakfast. "I don't want anything—

I'm not in the least hungry. And I like packing for myself, thank you," as a hand far from clean laid hold of his pyjamas. " If you'd run round the corner and fetch me a taxi, I'd be awfully obliged, and these things will be all ready by the time you come back. Thanks awfully—I'm in a great hurry."

At long last, and after many protestations and more unwelcome offers of assistance, Mrs. Fishcote lumbered down the stairs to fetch a taxi. As soon as she had gone, Wylie leaped to the window and flung it wide. The morning was hot, the street stuffy, and Mrs. Fishcote fat and overclothed. Definitely, Wylie thought, he would have preferred the 'am.

His taxi arrived, a creaky, broken-down affair with no springs ; and, to delay matters more, Mrs. Fishcote turned out to have no change, and insisted, after searching all the tea-pots and tea-caddies in which odd silver might have been secreted, in going " round the corner " to get some. She was as meticulously honest as her husband was the reverse ; but the virtue, at the moment, was as maddening as the fault. At length the convoy arrived at the station, only to find that the morning connection for Sands-on-Sea had left twenty minutes before, and that there would not be another for three hours or so. In a fury of impotence, Wylie cursed the taxi-driver and the station officials up hill and down dale, and flung out into the nearest restaurant, where, in revulsion against the Fishcote catering, he unwisely ate a large and highly indigestible meal, washed down with copious draughts of very gassy beer, which was all the restaurant could provide. As a result, he reached Sands-on-Sea late in the day, possessed with a raging stomach-ache, a head full of churning cotton-wool, and a temper which the Islands of the Blest could hardly have soothed ; and looked gloomily at an expensive plate-glass object calling itself the Hotel

Splendide. Lacking the information which Inspector Cavanagh possessed, he had intended to see whether he could not locate the scene of Percy Bittaford's demise for himself, without waiting for Dolly's reply; but found that the zest had gone out of the chase. How could a detective detect, anyway, who had a blazing stomach-ache? So, having surveyed with a jaundiced eye the thronging strollers on the sea-front, and the equally thronging but more heavily painted squatters in the hotel lounge, he retired angrily to his expensive bedroom—and found that there was no soap in the soap-dish and that the bed was so unnecessarily soft as nearly to stifle him. The chambermaid, coming in to set the room to rights, was greeted with a volley of remarks which sent her flying out into the corridor again.

By the next morning the immediate physical distress had faded somewhat, and the detective instinct began to reassert itself. But for some time the detective had no luck. In a place so essentially of the present and so unwilling to face the end of life as Sands-on-Sea, it is not at all easy to find out, at a moment's notice, details about the last hours of a visitor who died there six months previously. Visitors who die at pleasure resorts, anyhow, are a grisly nuisance, bad for trade and a menace to the superstitious. Their place of death endeavours to conceal the whole incident, and their neighbours instinctively turn their heads the other way, unless they make a newspaper story. And there is no newspaper story in the death of a middle-aged garage proprietor from cancer. A few inquiries, made of the staff of the Hotel Splendide, and of café and bathing-machine proprietors, convinced Wylie that the whole of the population of Sands-on-Sea were May-flies, born at the beginning of the summer season and perishing weakly in the first frosts; indeed, he was

rather inclined to believe that the town itself sprang up afresh each year, like a kind of Wembley Exhibition —which, indeed, some of it closely resembled—and that in order to find traces of a man who was alleged to have visited it in February one would have to dig, like an archæologist.

Local papers struck him as a possible source of information. They must surely continue to come out during the winter, and, in so empty a mausoleum as the town must be in February, the death even of one visitor must have created a perceptible gap. But when he went to the public library in search of local papers, he found that that institution was enjoying its annual turn out. The reference section was closed for the week; and a search of the papers in the reading-room disclosed nothing local, nothing but a regional newspaper with its headquarters miles away across country. "Oh, no," said a half-witted attendant, "there wasn't no local paper he'd ever heard of." Moodily Wylie went away, feeling that the town was in a conspiracy to defraud him of information.

Of course, he might have solved all his difficulties in a few minutes by application at the local police station —but he was still firmly resolved to have nothing to do with the police. Or a search of parish registers might reasonably have been expected to disclose the names and addresses of those who had died in the place during the past years. But he did not know how many parish registers there might be, or where to look for them; and, anyway, the weather continued extremely hot and, as he told himself petulantly, a fellow couldn't be expected to root about in musty old papers during the heat, especially when his inside kept giving him hell. The real difficulty, of course, was that he had the temperament of a gossip-writer but not of a research worker. He could have sat for hours listening to con-

versation and piecing together the facts from masses of incorrect oral testimony, but the thought of a desk, of pen and ink and card-indexes, filled him with cold horror. He decided to wait until Dolly's reply should arrive, which it did not do for a couple of days. In the meantime he wrote to Dolly describing his Lane experiences and tried, crossly and vainly, to amuse himself; but found that the girls of Sands-on-Sea were expensive, ugly, vapid and prone to dance new steps which he did not know; the cinemas stifling and showing continually bad American comic films; the food bad and expensive and the champagne, which was all the beastly girls would drink, even more expensive and liable to keep one awake and writhing until dawn.

At last the letter came. It was not as fat as the previous one, though considerably fatter than he would have expected as the answer to his question.

"DEAR SIR CHARLES WYLIE"—it ran—"Percy Bittaford died at Marine View, Sea Drive, Sands-on-Sea, on February 17th. And he died of cancer of the pancrease, whatever that may be when it's at home.

"There, I hope that's some use to you, for you wouldn't believe the bother I had to get it. I do really think Caroline's a bit thick; it simply isn't natural to howl when anybody ever mentions your husband when he's been dead six months; she can't have been as fond of him as all that. Anyway, I couldn't get her to talk sense, she sniffed and sobbed, and said, 'Why do you want to knoo-oo-oo?' And I didn't suppose you particularly wanted anybody to knoo-oo-oo, so I had to say 'Oh, it wasn't anything and it didn't matter and I didn't really want to know.' And then afterwards, if you please, if Mr. Dawes didn't come along and tell me in that fruity old voice of his that I was upsetting Mrs. Bittaford and I must hold my tongue and behave

prettily if I wanted to stop in the house—at least, there's what he meant. I as near as possible gave him a piece of my mind and asked what business it was of his; but all I did say was that I hadn't been anything like as bad as Mr. and Mrs. Cole, and they were pillars of righteousness, I'd always understood. He scowled at me for saucing him, but he didn't say anything more. And it's quite true about the old Coles; they were along here again last night, and they wanted to know what Percy'd got on his tombstone. They hoped it was a verse of his favourite hymn. I asked one of the fellows in the garage what Percy's favourite hymn was, and he said the Frothblowers' Anthem. So there you are—anyway, I went to the public library and looked up the papers, and found out about Percy's death. It didn't give the address even then, but a nice old codger like a tortoise only smellier who was reading there remembered all about it, and *he* told me.

"It was he told me about the pancrease, too, and in case you don't know it's some part of your inside. But I'm afraid I can't tell you much about Percy's illness, as you asked, because the old codger didn't know and said nobody did. They didn't, the neighbours, know he'd been ill until he went away, and they supposed he'd gone to get better until they heard he'd died. But the old man said he wasn't surprised, that Percy was always lifting his elbow and that ended in cancer of the innards as often as not." (Wylie, in an unexpected spasm of anxiety, put his hand to his own ill-used stomach. His activities of the past few days had disposed him to depression, and cancer was a terrifying thought. However, the pain seemed no worse than it had been half an hour ago. He continued reading.)

"I asked who his doctor was, because I thought I might get to know him and perhaps worm a bit about Percy out of him, but that's no good. Because it appears

he's skipped, leaving a whole lot of bills and a wife and children. But he did it about a month before Percy left, so it's no use trying to pin anything on him. (I'm sorry, I forgot it was Harold who you think was murdered, not Percy, but one gets muddled.) Anyway, it's a queer thing that nobody knows anything much about that, either. I did hear that Percy had his tonsils out about two years ago, and I hope you'll find that interesting.

"We had some doings here, yesterday. Tom Edwards that I told you of ran amuck and I really thought he was going to kill Mr. Dawes. I was in the garage when it started, because one of the fellows there (the one that said about the Frothblowers' Anthem) is teaching me to drive on the q.t., and I'd just come in to look at the car we were going out in. (It's fun being taught in a garage, because you can try all sorts of different cars, if you're careful to do it when nobody's likely to come in.) Then Mr. Dawes came in, and began talking to Tom about some job that hadn't been ready to time. I suppose he was telling him off, really, but he spoke quite pleasant at the start, and after all I suppose he *is* half the boss, so to speak. But Tom wasn't having any. First he sulked and didn't say a word, and then when Mr. Dawes went on he upped and let him have it. I don't remember most of what he said, but some of it was certainly, 'Think you're the goods here, do you? Well, you aren't yet, not by a long chalk, and I'm going to tell you where you get off!' And then he got what I call personal, anyway, the idea of it was that he was accusing Mr. Dawes of wanting to marry Caroline, at least I suppose it was that, and that he was going to stop it. 'After all I've been through,' he said, and he sounded quite batty, 'do you suppose I'm going to let anybody else lay a finger on her?' Mr. Dawes didn't say much, he kept trying to look like

the boss which must have been difficult with Tom dancing round him and yelling, but at that he did kick. 'Keep your tongue quiet, my man,' he said, 'or you'll maybe be looking out for another job before long.' 'You daren't sack me! You daren't sack me!' shouts Tom, and picks up a great big spanner and waves it at him. 'And if you don't quit jabbering I'm going to knock your block off for you,' or something like that. And then he went for Mr. Dawes with the spanner and there was a regular shine, all the garage boys trying to hold him down, but he's as strong as a bull like I told you. And I suppose Mr. Dawes thought it would be soft to run away, so he didn't, but he hopped round the garage with Tom after him wi h the spanner, it was a scream if you like. And then in the middle of it there suddenly walked in that old Cole image on his short legs and squealed, 'Peace, brother, peace! Lay aside that object!' and Tom gave one look at him and dropped the spanner, and laid hold of old Cole by his legs and tipped him over his shoulder and just gave a swing with him and threw him head first at Mr. Dawes. You never saw such a thing in your life, the old geezer's beard flying out behind him and then coming right over the top when Tom threw him. I and the garage boys let out a great yell, we just couldn't help it, and Tom seemed to hear that and stopped, and Mr. Dawes went out and old Cole put his beard back where it belonged, and went out too. So that was the end of that and I think Tom said he was sorry, or perhaps Caroline who's a bit soft about him owing to him being looney about her said a word for him, anyway, he wasn't sacked and they're all as meek as doves this morning. But I just can't tell you how Mr. Cole looked, going upside down through the garage, I do wish you could have seen it. Only I do think Tom's dangerous with a paddy like that and I wish they'd send him to Northamp-

ton and have done with it, especially if he's got it in his head like that about Caroline. Because of course she won't marry him, she don't care two pins about him, you can see that with half an eye, and I should think she'd marry Mr. Dawes if she married anybody and why not? Only I don't think she's over-keen, anyway.

"Ron's taken to screaming at nights now. I can hear it from my room, but he says it's only nightmares and not much of them at that, and I'm not to fuss. It can't be Caroline's food, because that's A1. I should think anybody might want to marry her just for her cooking. Only I wish Ron wouldn't go on like that; I'm afraid even to tell him about things like Tom's row, because it might upset him, and that's partly why I've written all about it to you. I don't suppose it'll be any good to you.

"Yours sincerely,

"DOROTHY DANIELLS.

P.S.—"Thank you for the big letter. That girl's a softy."

Wylie reread the letter, chuckled, and heaved a sigh of relief. Here, at last, was an address, and an address, moreover, which sounded like a boarding-house, where one might expect to find elderly and gossipy inhabitants. He immediately called for his bill, the size of which startled even his uneconomic soul, and set forth in search of Marine View.

Marine View *was* a boarding-house—even to the aspidistras. But alas! it was a very nearly full boarding-house. The only room left vacant was a small, uncomfortable oven immediately under the roof; but Wylie, uneasily conscious that the faded and respectable proprietress was distinctly doubtful about his own respectability, hastily closed with it. After all, one need

only sleep in the room. One could suck the brains and memories of the Permanent Residents all day. Wylie learned joyfully that the evening meal was taken in common—in the basement—at seven-fifteen, and descended to a dusty writing-room to compose a letter to Dolly Daniells. After all, she had amused as well as assisted him. Her picture of the monumental Mr. Cole hurtling through the air had given him several seconds' pleasure, and she seemed to be pretty bored, poor kid. Certainly she deserved a caustic pen-picture of the delights of Sands-on-Sea.

CHAPTER XV

MARINE VIEW

A BOARDING-HOUSE *ought* to contain Permanent Residents. Unfortunately not all boarding-houses do, and Marine View was one of those which fail to come up to standard. When Wylie first entered the stuffy underground dining-room, his hopes rose high, for several of those present were of the " solid and respectable " or " aged and infirm " types from which the bulk of Permanent Residents are drawn ; and he sat down with the intention of making a good selection.

His immediate entourage was, however, unfortunate. On his right sat a languid and complaining lady whose finances had been so badly afflicted by the slump as to necessitate her spending the summer in England for the first time for many years. Wylie was inclined to discount the quantity of foreign travel to which she laid claim, but it was fairly clear that she had not hitherto sunk as low as Sands-on-Sea. On his left sat a very young man, who belonged to a very young

woman sitting next him, who belonged in part to a still younger man sitting on her far side. They were in tennis clothes; they squealed and giggled, and slapped one another. They were obviously May-flies of the worst possible type, and their previous incarnations seemed to have covered most of the seaside resorts of England, of which Sands-on-Sea, according to their conversation, was the putridest, the absolutely washoutest, and the one which of all they least desired to see again. Even if they had stayed in the boarding-house for any length of time, Wylie decided, their brains would certainly not be equal to the strain of recollecting any event which had taken place more than a week previously. Opposite him were a thin, hungry clergyman, and two Germans, two thorough, incredibly guttural Germans whose almost unintelligible English made it improbable that they had spent more than a month in this country, and beyond them again, were some of the Indian students who seem invariably to adorn boarding-houses of this kind. Wylie settled to try for a quiet talk in the drawing-room after dinner, and chose an elderly lady with a fichu as the most probable Permanent Resident. She sat, he observed, on the right hand of the proprietress, and was helped first and freely to all dishes. This seemed to indicate either wealth or permanence. He duly found her in the drawing-room, after a short interval spent in fortifying himself with a drink, and with a little effort succeeded in entering into conversation.

Unfortunately, the lady turned out to be only quasi-Permanent, that is to say, she was Regular, but regular only for August and September of every year. It was fifteen years now since her first arrival, and she always had the same room, and Mrs. Berridge was quite reasonably considerate though she never seemed to be able to keep the same maids, and of course the hot

water wasn't really satisfactory, but then where was it, unless you paid ten or twelve guineas a week, and *then* you couldn't be sure. . . . Then she hadn't been here when the man died? Wylie asked, diving into the stream. *Died?* What man? When? In February, Wylie said, and indicated that she might have seen something about it in the papers. At which the lady froze him with a look, remarked that it seemed a very unpleasant subject and that she always went to the Riviera in February and would prefer not to discuss it, but (relenting slightly) that Mrs. Foxley in the farther corner often stayed here in the winter and might know —that is, if he *really* wanted to talk about it. She dismissed him in a majestic and impassive manner, and returned, apparently, to her library book; but when she saw him sidling over to Mrs. Foxley, she rose and with an air of concentration made for the door. Wylie had an uneasy feeling that she might be going to report the conversation instantly to the respectable and considerate Mrs. Berridge, who would hardly regard it with favour in any case, and might even go the length of refusing to retain a detective as one of her paying guests. He must approach Mrs. Foxley without delay.

Mrs. Foxley—dear, dear, how tiresome!—had not been staying at Marine View during the past winter, though she had many other winters to bring to his notice if he cared to consider them. But Mrs. Foxley was *very* interested. Mrs. Foxley was also rather deaf; and before he had explained to her satisfaction what it was all about and what he wanted to know, Wylie found that he had collected an interested half-circle consisting of all the other occupants of the room, through which his shouts of "Bittaford! Cancer! Yeovil! Newspapers!" seemed to his apprehensive ears to echo like thunder claps. "*Sir Charles Wylie!*" came in a final yell as Mrs. Foxley, denying that she

knew anything about Mr. Bittaford's death, demanded his own name in return ; and at that there was a gentle tap on the arm of his chair and a soft voice murmured, " Oh, Sir *Charles* ! " in his ear. He turned and saw one of the pinkest and most brassy-haired ladies he had ever seen in his life smiling ingratiatingly at him.

" Oh, Sir *Charles* ! " said the apparition again. " You won't remember me, I'm shaw ; but I've seen you *so* often." (" Liar ! " said Wylie to himself.) " My name's Devene—Julie Devene. I stay here such a *lot*, because my husband's in India, you know, and I know *all* about—what you're asking. Only, of course, I never like to *talk* about it."

Wylie in a low voice—the half-circle having now settled to an amicable discussion of cancer, tuberculosis, Bright's disease, and other ills which affect the human frame—intimated his pleasure that this inhibition had now been overcome ; but it appeared that he was too hasty. It had not by any means been overcome, yet. First, Mrs. Devene required to be assured that he meant no *harm* to anybody. She could not bear to think of doing *harm* to anybody ; and although Wylie's face (and probably Wylie's title) went far to calm her fears, still one wanted to be *certain*. That snag surmounted, the lady was still reticent, and by slow degrees approached the main point, which was, that she could not *possibly* disclose all the grisly facts known to her in front of *tittle-tattlers*. The poor man was dead, it was true ; and possibly people might say that being dead he might not care what was said about him after death, but she—well, many people might call her a sentimentalist, but she could never bear to find herself not talking of the dead exactly as they would have liked to hear if they had been alive. But other people were so *callous* ; they didn't appear to mind *what* they said, either of the dead or the living, for the matter of that

Etcetera. Wylie, somewhat puzzled, tried to suggest some atmosphere more suitable for confidences. The dining-room—that seemed bony and unattractive. Besides, people were probably laying breakfast in it. The stairs—hardly; they were narrow and contained no suitable alcoves. The smoking-room—but "Oh, *no*," said Mrs. Devene; the smoking-room was full of *men*, and though all her friends were angry when she said it, men were *really far* worse gossips than women. *But*—she had a sitting-room of her own, really a nice sitting-room which was *quite* quiet, where they'd be *quite* comfy, and if he wouldn't mind just coming along to the first floor, she had—well, *something*. . . . At this point a smile of incredible archness came over her face, and she remarked again that her husband was in India. "Well!" Wylie thought as he rose to his feet, "if ever there was a rattlesnake with an unmistakable rattle——" He was perfectly confident in his own powers of restraining any number of brassy-haired ladies, but he felt that it was perhaps a little unfortunate that they should meet the considerate Mrs. Berridge on their way upstairs. She gave him a glance which indicated very deep consideration, and he was not at all sure that he wanted to be considered at the moment.

Mrs. Devene's sitting-room was very minute, and had probably been turned into a sitting-room because as a bedroom it would have about fitted Tom Thumb, and being on the first floor could not very well be used for a servant. However, no doubt Mr. Devene in India paid a large sum for it, and it certainly contained two chairs and a table. Also a cupboard, out of which its owner, with a smile still more arch, rapidly produced a bottle, two glasses and a plate.

"Ah! but you mustn't be shocked, Sir Charles!" she exclaimed, entirely misinterpreting Wylie's horrified glance at the label on the bottle. "I *know* people are

so much happier when they are talking if they've just got a *wee* drink to sip at. And in this dreadful heat there's nothing like a little champagne to set one up, is there? Now you must positively have a glass, and just a tiny bit of my special cake, or I shall be terribly offended and shan't tell you a thing!" She poured it out, and Wylie sipped it. It was sweeter than his gloomiest anticipations. Sweet champagne—and sweet cake. He wondered whether any information in the world was worth it.

"No, don't take *that* chair, Sir Charles!" the lady exclaimed in a squeal. "It's *dreadfully* unsafe—I never let my visitors take *that* chair. Sit down in the other one, and make yourself quite comfortable. Oh, no, *I'll* be perfectly all right; I know its ways quite well, and you only have to know them to be *quite* all right. There!" She packed herself elegantly into the chair, which groaned but made no serious protest. "Now, then, we'll be quite comfortable. *Do* smoke, Sir Charles! Have you been staying here long? It's rather a *terrible* place, isn't it? Do you know Santa Margherita?"

Wylie did not, but he had to listen to a brief catalogue of its merits, and a comparison of those with the merits of other places, before he was allowed to get near the subject of his call. Even then it had to be approached gradually, *via* his own person and character, the location of his estates, his friends and neighbours in Devonshire, his habits and avocations, and so on. The lady, Wylie reflected, used a good strong pump handle, and certainly meant to get value for any information which she possessed. At long last, however, when he was nearly on the point of flight, she turned a hard, brilliant smile on him and patting his knee affectionately said:

"But, of course, if you live in Devonshire, *that's* how you come to know about that poor man and his dreadful brother. You know, I always said he'd come

to a bad end—the moment I set eyes upon him, I knew it!"

"Which—the poor man, or the dreadful brother?" Wylie wanted to know.

"Oh, the brother, of course. The poor man—Mr. Bittaford—was marked for death before ever he came here. I could see it in his face—you know I can always see a thing like that, Sir Charles; I've seen a *great many* people marked for death before they knew a *thing* about it themselves," fixing him with a disconcerting eye, suggesting a sort of Upas-tree. "I said so to Mrs. Berridge at the time, but she wasn't at all pleased. Of course, *she* wanted to hush it all up."

"Why did she want to hush it up?"

"Oh, because it was so very odd, you know. So dreadful and so sudden—and that horrible brother. . . . I'll tell you *all* about it, Sir Charles; but you must *positively* have another glass first. No, indeed you must. Look, I'll join you in just a little drop—I mustn't drink *too* much, must I?—but, you know, in India one gets used to it. There! Now fill your own glass—that's right. Well . . ."

It was not well; it was very far from well, Wylie reflected crossly, as he tried to pick some coherent sense out of the confusion of Mrs. Devene's italics and her melodramatic mind. Undoubtedly there had been a buzz at the time of Percy Bittaford's death, and undoubtedly it had come more suddenly than any one expected; but the buzz appeared to be due to no more than that suddenness and the fact that it had occurred in a boarding-house and at a pleasure resort. There had not even been an inquest. All that had happened could really have been told in a few words, though Mrs. Devene spun it out to last for three-quarters of an hour. The two brothers, Percy and Harold Bittaford, had arrived in the boarding-house at the end of

January. Percy was then looking very ill, and it was given out that he was suffering from severe chronic indigestion; and as a high proportion of those who spend the winter months at pleasure resorts do suffer from severe chronic indigestion, no particular notice was taken of it for a few days, except (apparently) by Mrs. Devene, who had *instantly* noticed the *peculiar* look in his eyes. "Drugs, you know, Sir Charles. So *many* people in India take to drugs that I've *always* got my eyes open. And as soon as I saw him the first day, I said to myself, 'You're a *drug-fiend*,' though, of course, I'd no idea what he was drugging himself about, poor man. And he was so *yellow*—I knew it couldn't be anything else."

But after a few days, it seemed, Percy Bittaford's disease took a turn for the worse. He had to retire to bed, the doctor was sent for, and the truth, to Mrs. Berridge at least, made plain.

"I wonder she let him stay here," Wylie commented. "I wonder she didn't insist on his going to hospital, or to a nursing home."

"Well, of course, she wanted him to. But they begged and begged, and they'd paid for a month in advance or something like that, and Mr. Harold Bittaford was *very* unpleasant about it, I understand, and said he'd sue her for breach of contract and tell all the papers that she'd turned a sick man out of doors at a moment's notice, and she'd only two people staying here at the time besides me——"

"Who were they, do you know?" Wylie interrupted.

"Oh, a Colonel Somebody and his wife I'm sure I don't remember. Anyway, *they* wouldn't know anything about it," said the lady, slightly offended. "I don't believe they even *noticed* there was anything wrong. But—what was I saying? Oh, of course, Mrs. Berridge. . . . Well, she didn't like to turn away money, and

perhaps have to *pay*, too, you see; and, anyway, she didn't think he was going to die."

"Not of cancer?" Wylie said.

"I mean not then. The doctor didn't either, I know for a fact. He said it was just a bad turn, and he'd get over it. He was quite as surprised as anybody when he suddenly died."

"Oh!" Wylie pricked up his ears. "Who was the doctor, do you know?"

"Oh, I can't remember his name. Something like Hunter or Bunter or Jumper," said Mrs Devene. "He was a silly little man, always making some sort of silly joke. And think of not *seeing* the poor man was going to die—why, I could have told him that!"

"Did you see him—when he was ill—then?" Wylie asked.

"Oh, Sir *Charles*, no! Of course not. It was before, I saw him, I could see death in his face the moment I set eyes upon him. Why, nobody was allowed to see him except that horrible brother of his, and another man called Mr. Dawes, who came down to see him a day or two before he died."

"Mr. Dawes, did you say? A big black fellow, with a beard."

"Yes, that's the man. And a great pity it was, for poor Mr. Bittaford, that he didn't come sooner."

"Why?"

"Because he might have *saved* him!" said Mrs. Devene triumphantly. "If he hadn't been left alone with that horrible brother of his."

Wylie tried to extract more detailed information about the horrors of the brother, whom he had last seen lying dead on the shores of his own creek, but he had little success. He suspected that the real sin of Mr. Harold Bittaford lay in proving insusceptible to the charms of Mrs. Devene, which might be considered

excusable under the circumstances. He was disappointed; he had formed his own very definite views of Harold Bittaford's character, and would have liked him to turn out the villain of the piece. But Mrs. Devene could contribute nothing but her own strong prejudices to bolster up this theory. Dawes, on the other hand, had made a good impression on her; he "spoke very nicely," and had seemed genuinely upset by his friend's unexpected death, whereas Harold Bittaford had not turned a hair.

"What about the wife? Percy's wife, I mean," Wylie wondered. "Didn't she turn up at all?"

She had come after he was dead, for the funeral, it appeared. But she had been very much distressed, and had been looked after closely by the other two men. Mrs. Devene, much to her own regret, had not even had an opportunity of saying a kind word to her.

"Um-m-m," Wylie considered a little. "I rather wish you could have remembered the doctor's name. It would have helped."

"I can't," said Mrs. Devene with decision. "It was a silly sort of name, that's all I know, and just suited the man. I'd never have anything to do with him if *I* were ill. But, if you *really* want to know his name, I dare say—— *Do* have a little more wine, Sir Charles! Oh, yes, really you must. Just like that—I dare say the maid that did their room would know. She was in and out a good deal, most of the time, and I happen to know she's not left like most of them do. I saw her about only yesterday."

"What's her name, and where can I find her?" Wylie asked.

"Muriel's her name. I expect she'll bring your tea to you to-morrow morning—no, she won't. I remember she told me she wasn't doing that now. It's Rose who is doing that now. I'll show you which she is to-morrow,

sometime, if I can. But, oh, Sir Charles, *do* tell me what it's all about! Are you *really* a detective?"

Wylie said he was not, and proceeded to try to explain his own views of his functions. But Mrs. Devene, he quickly discovered, was not interested, either in his self-imposed task, or, really, in the late Mr. Bittaford. All her interest lay in the detaining of a baronet in her private sitting-room for as long as possible, and for goodness knew what nefarious designs; but he was wary enough, aided perhaps by the increasing protests of his stomach, to escape with no more than what he trusted was an adequately moving pressure of the hand. He did not like the lady's scent, or her powder. Nor, as he mounted rather giddily up the stairs, wondering if Mrs. Berridge was lying in wait to catch him, did he like her sweet champagne. He pushed open the door of his top-floor apartment, and gasped at the wave of stuffy heat which flowed over him.

"Oh, Lord! what a life! What's the betting the whole thing's a cock-and-bull story, that the woman made up just in order to detain me? Well, it looks as though I was going to pay for it all right. Phew!" With a heart-felt groan he staggered over to the wash-stand, took a sip of the warm brackish water which the carafe contained, and threw it away in disgust, taking instead a pull from his own flask. "Oh, Lord, what filthy stuff! I feel like nothing on earth. And *what* a night I'm going to have!" Which proved to be a true prophecy.

CHAPTER XVI

THE KIND CHAMBERMAID

RAT-TAT-A-TAT ! Rat-TAT-a-TAT !

" Oh, *come in* ! "

" Your tea, sir." A bright, pleasant-faced maid with pink cheeks and curly dark hair, who somehow managed to look fresh and cool in spite of the heat of the morning, opened the door of Wylie's room and proffered a rather unattractive cup of tea on a very unattractive tray—the equipment, obviously, being that reserved for the upper and less eligible rooms. " Your tea, sir," she said again, and smiled at him.

" Tea ! " Wylie raised a wan, damp head from an incredibly tumbled nest of bedclothes, and scowled at her. " I don't want tea ! I want aspirin—lots—and bicarbonate of soda "

" Are you ill, sir ? You do look bad." The girl advanced into the room with an expression of commiseration. " Shall I call Mrs. Berridge ?

" No, for God's sake. Look here, Rose—you look a kind Rose—did you ever lie in an oven with a red-hot poker inside you ? Because that's what I'm like now. I've got a pain, Rose—*such* a pain—everywhere I can have a pain except in my little finger and I'm not sure about that, and I want you to be a good kind Rose and find me some aspirin and some bicarbonate of soda, and a lot of hot water, right away, if you can. I'm sure you know where to get some, if you only care to—Rose. Oo-oo ! " He sat up and clasped his stomach with an exaggerated expression of agony In spite of herself the girl smiled ; she had very pleasant dimples.

"I'll see what I can do, sir. I won't be a minute. But it isn't Rose, sir; it's Muriel. Rose isn't on this morning."

"Oh! Muriel, I say! *Muriel!*" Forgetting his troubles, Wylie half-leapt out of bed, but the girl had gone. In a few minutes, however, she was back again, carrying the medicaments which he had demanded, and —wonderful to relate—a clean cool pillow

"Now you drink that off, sir," she said, mixing him his potion; "and just let me tidy up your bed for you—like that—and then you lay down and have a nice sleep. I'll tell Mrs Berridge you won't be wanting any breakfast, so she won't be worrying, like; and if you *do* feel you could fancy anything when you wake up, you just touch that bell over there, and I'll come. I won't be far away. Now do just lie down and take it easy a bit, sir, and you'll find it'll pass off all right I'll get you a hot-water bottle, if you like; there's nothing like it for the stomach-ache."

"Thank you, Muriel, you're a sportswoman. But, look here," said Wylie, making no immediate effort to obey orders, "I think I'd better see a leech—doctor, you know—some time about this You know—oughtn't to neglect a pain—even if it's only a bally stomach-ache—what? No, I don't want anybody called, I just want the name of a nice chap I could pop around and see when my blasted belly, if you'll excuse the word, is feeling a bit more like a walk. Now, you must know any amount of doctors. What do *you* feel about it?"

"Well, sir . . ." Muriel puckered her brows. "I don't know that I can call to mind right off——"

"What about the chap who came to see that poor fellow who died here, last spring—Bittaford, wasn't it?" Wylie said.

"Oh—*him*. Why, I don't know as you'd like him,

sir," the girl said doubtfully. "Mrs. Berridge doesn't think nothing of him, now, with his telling her the poor gentleman would be good for three months or more and him going off the moment the doctor's back was turned, so to speak."

"Let's have his name, anyhow," Wylie said. "He might be better than nobody."

"Bunting, his name is. Dr. Bunting. And he lives at 13 Wardrop Crescent, just second on the right past the square," Muriel said. "He's quite a nice jolly spoken gentleman. Only Mrs. Berridge didn't seem to think he was no good, not after the way he'd made that mistake."

"Well, after all, any of us might have made a mistake, once in a way. Tell me, you saw Mr. Bittaford, didn't you, quite a lot? Did *you* think he was as ill as all that?"

"Oo, he was pretty bad, sir, after the first two or three days, when he was downstairs. Then he took to his bed and never got up no more. So I used to see him whenever I came in to do the room, and he *was* pretty bad. It wasn't so much that he seemed to be in a lot of pain, sir, though they do say that cancer's awful pain; but he was so heavy-like and such a queer yellowy colour and muttering to himself—he didn't seem to be in his right mind, somehow."

"Dope, I suppose," said Wylie, half to himself.

"That's what they said, sir, and I expect it was merciful, really, because the other Mr. Bittaford said he'd be in awful pain without it. But it used to give me a turn, sometimes, to come in and see him lying there like a corpse, and sometimes talking away to himself and not seeming even to know who he was, as often as not."

"How do you mean?"

" Why, he'd open his eyes suddenly and say ' Where's Percy ? ' and then he'd say ' Where's Harold ? ' and, you know, one of them was Percy—I mean *he* was Percy—and the other one was Harold, so it stands to reason he couldn't have been both. And then he'd say, ' Where am I ? I thought I was in Yeovil. Why aren't I in Yeovil ? ' or something like that—only he used to mutter and mumble so, you couldn't rightly make out what he was saying, and, anyway, he didn't sound in his proper mind, so it wasn't no use taking any particular notice, was it ? "

" Didn't he have a nurse, all the while ? "

" No ; the other Mr. Bittaford did it all. He knew all about it, and his brother couldn't abide the idea of a nurse, he said, and Dr. Bunting said it didn't matter, that really nobody couldn't do any good and he might just as well have it how he wanted. Of course, afterwards, when the poor gentleman went and died so sudden, they wished they'd had one, but nobody could have known, could they ? And I'll say that for Mr. Bittaford, he was as careful of his brother as any nurse could have been. He practically never went out, not without I'd promised to keep an eye on him, except once when that friend of his, Mr. Dawes, was there and he stopped with him. It was a shame, wasn't it, Mrs. Bittaford not getting there till after he was dead, and she such a nice homely sort of lady and so brave about it, too." (" Sort of courage that doesn't last long," Wylie reflected, comparing Dolly's letters and his own recollections of Mrs. Caroline Bittaford.) " I was so sorry for her."

" You didn't like Mr. Bittaford, though—Harold Bittaford, I mean ? " Wylie conjectured.

" No, sir, to tell you the truth I didn't," the girl said, flushing faintly. " He wasn't really a very nice sort of man, I don't think. But whatever anybody says of

him, he *was* as good to his brother as anybody could be, I will say that." There was an indignant clangour from somewhere below. "Goodness me! I mustn't stop talking any longer or they'll be after me. Now you lie down, sir, and get a nice sleep, do; I'll see nobody disturbs you, not till you wake of yourself." And she was gone.

"Whew!" said Wylie to himself, leaning back on his pillows. "This is beginning to look a little bit fishy. This Bunting chap is clearly the fellow I've got to see next—but I'd like to think things out a bit first. Mrs. Berridge is hardly likely to come up and give me notice when I'm supposed to be asleep."

He lay down, in order to think the problem out fully; but, somewhat to his own surprise, fell fast asleep in reality before a quarter of an hour had passed. He was feeling a good deal better, though not cured, before he finally set forth in search of Dr Bunting.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DOCTOR

"WELL, upon my bloody aunt, if it isn't Chick! Chick, my *dear* chap, what a hell's hole to find you in!"

"And the same to you, Charles. What on earth are you doing here? I think it's ten years since we met, isn't it, down at that place in Buckinghamshire where we gave George Berry the boot polish in his cocktail—but I'd have known you anywhere."

"Can't say the same for you, Chick," Wylie replied, with a grin. "If it hadn't been for the asinine way you still cut your hair I'd never have known it was you. You've got fat, Chick; you're going to have a corporation like an alderman's; and, worst of all, you've developed a blinking bedside manner. You're becoming prosperous, Chick; and here of all places. God help you."

Dr. Edward Bunting, once a medical student in the Latin Quarter, chuckled and slapped himself, causing his incipient paunch to waggle convivially. "That's all right, my boy," he said. "Make the fat where the fat's to be found, and then retire and live happily on the proceeds. Come back in a dozen years, and you'll find I've taken my plate down and become a first-class country gentleman. But *not*," he added with a sudden change of tone, "if I stand about wasting valuable time yattering about nothing. These are consulting hours. Come, Charles, what's your trouble?"

"Belly-ache,' said Wylie briefly. "At least——"

"Evil-living, if I know you," Dr. Bunting said. "Out with your tongue."

"Tongue be blowed," said Wylie. "What I want to see you about, Chick, now I know it's you, particularly, is—— "

"Mean to say," said the doctor severely, "that you've come here in working hours, trying to waste my time, on a miserable pretence of having a belly-ache? "

"Pretence, nothing! " said Wylie, firing up instantly at the accusation of malingering. "I've got the hell of a pain; I've had it ever since I came into your accursed city and drank its blasted drink. By God, I don't wonder you fellows can afford to retire, if you spend your time poisoning your visitors! But that can stand over. I've got something really important to ask you about, a bit of past history, if you like——"

"Then you don't ask it now," the doctor said. "Tell you I'm *busy*, at half a guinea a time. You can come and yarn about your history after seven this evening, if you like; I'll have finished by then, but I'm blowed if I waste time answering your questions in consulting hours. Seven o'clock, and we'll have a bite of supper. And, as you *are* here, if you say you've really got a belly-ache, I suppose I'd better have a look at you. Come over to the light. Lord, you're a filthy colour, aren't you? " Rapidly he pulled Wylie's person about, dug him painfully beneath the ribs, looked in the corners of his eyes and in his mouth, and made witch-passes in the air, talking all the time. "Been drinking bad fizz and racketing about? . . . I thought so. And in this weather too. You'll give yourself cirrhosis, Charles, one of these days, and then you'll pay a fat fee to some London quack. The insanity of some people! Here "—he scratched on a piece of paper—"get a chemist to make that up, swallow it down, don't get drunk at lunch or pick up a girl in the afternoon, and maybe by seven you'll have some idea what

you're talking about. Get out, now . . . hi! not so quick. That'll be ten and six, please, and cheap at the price. Thanks. See you at seven." A final vigorous pat on the shoulder sent Wylie staggering giddily out into the sunlight.

The consultation may have been brief, but it was profitable to both sides. Dr. Bunting's prescription proved surprisingly efficacious, and Wylie even felt recovered enough to return to Marine View and try to get some more information out of Muriel the maid. But as he went up the steps he caught sight of Mrs. Berridge looking out of one of the front windows, and her expression, when she saw him, was such that he beat a prompt retreat. At least, if he kept outside the house, she could not order him to leave it instantly, and he was not at all sure that his need of Marine View was over. Instead, he retired to a quiet hotel, where over a restrained cup of tea he wrote again to Dolly Daniells, reporting his conversation with the maid and his growing conviction that there was something at least fishy about the death of Percy Bittaford. On the stroke of seven, punctually, he presented himself again at the door of No. 13 Wardrop Crescent, and found Dr. Bunting engaged in slapping bottles into white paper.

"Shan't be a jiffy," he said. "Just dab some sealing-wax on these fellows, there's a good chap, and we'll be through in two twos. No," in response to a murmured question from Wylie, "no, I don't keep a dispenser. What's the use of throwing good money away? I can do all the making-up I want done, and I teach my patients not to have faith in bottles—nasty exploded superstitions."

"Then what are these?"

"Oh, you've got to have *some* bottles. People won't do without 'em altogether. But I keep 'em as few as

possible and make 'em up myself. Keeps the personal touch and saves the chemist's profits."

"Then why," Wylie asked, "did you send *me* to a chemist's this morning?"

"Because you were in a hurry, and there wasn't threepence in it, anyway," the doctor replied frankly. "You can give me the threepence now, if you're feeling generous. There, that's the lot of them. Come and have supper—bottled Bass for you, my boy; and you'll say yet I've saved your life."

"Look here, Chick," the guest began, as soon as they had gnawed their way through a fair portion of their supper, Dr. Bunting washing it down with a good deal more whisky than Wylie, confined to Bass, thought was fair, "what I want to talk to you about is this. I'm staying at a place called Marine View——"

"And you want a candid opinion on their catering. Rotten," said Dr. Bunting through a mouthful of cold pie. "I've had at least two patients poisoned by them already."

"No, you oaf. I haven't gone there for the cooking. I've gone there about a chap called Bittaford, who died there a few months ago, and I want your candid opinion on *that*."

"On Bittaford? Dead. As a door nail. And a rotten poor life too, if you ask me. Why worry?"

"What did he die of?"

"Cancer of the pancreas."

"Sure of that?"

"Of course I'm sure. I could feel it, and that shows it was a pretty hefty one. It's only once in a blue moon you can feel a cancer of the pancreas. Anyhow, cancer isn't a thing one makes mistakes about. What's eating you?"

"You don't think it might have been faked?"

"I do *not*. You try faking a cancer, and see what a

mess you'll make of it. Of course it wasn't faked. As a matter of fact, if you want to know, I had a chap from the fellow's insurance company fussing around afterwards, so if I had gone off my chump and certified D.T. as a cancer case, if that's what you're getting at, I should have had plenty of time to think again, see ? "

" As a matter of fact," said Wylie, " I was told he died of morphine poisoning."

" So he did, of course. So do nearly all cancer cases, more or less, and he was pretty full up with morphia before I got a look at him. I shouldn't——" said the doctor, and checked himself. " I mean, that doesn't mean he hadn't got cancer, see ?—though actually it was the morphia finished him off."

" You wouldn't what ? "

" Never you mind. None of your business."

" Meaning," said Wylie, " that you wouldn't have given him so much morphia, if he'd been your case, but that you don't think it's medical etiquette to say so, eh ? "

" *I've* said nothing," said the doctor. " If you choose to read meanings into my silences, it's none of my affair."

" Well, but weren't you, as a matter of fact, taken by surprise when he died so suddenly ? " The doctor gave him a long look, and took some more whisky.

" Look here, Charles, you know perfectly well that this won't do, unless you tell me what you're driving at. I'm a doctor in practice here. It's none of my business, and it wouldn't do me any good to go gossiping about my cases to every Tom, Dick or Harry that comes along. This Bittaford person wasn't by way of being a friend of yours, was he ? No ? Then what on earth do you want to know about him for ? "

" You won't even tell me whether you were surprised at his death or not ? "

"I will not. Not unless you give me a very good reason for wanting to know."

Wylie sighed. "Well . . . I'd hoped to get an unbiased opinion from you, before you knew anything that could influence you either way; but if you won't give it, you won't. Did you by any chance see a piece in the papers, about a fortnight ago, of a chap, also called Bittaford, who got drowned in my creek?"

"Was it your creek?" asked the doctor with interest. "I remember somebody telling me that that chap had got what was coming to him, but I didn't know *you*'d got anything to do with it. I'll admit I didn't read the thing up; I come across too many corpses in the way of business to take much of an interest in them in newspapers. Why did you drown him?"

"Don't be a fool. Why did you say 'got what was coming to him'? Didn't you like the fellow?"

"Can't say I did, particularly. Not my type at all. A nasty, oily, ugly sort of little beggar, and shifty as they make 'em. Sort of chap who'd murder his grandmother for twopence as soon as look at her."

"Or his brother?" Wylie suggested. The doctor jumped.

"There you go again—with your insinuations. Will you tell me, slowly, please, and in words of one syllable, exactly what you mean?"

"Well, it's like this." As clearly as he could, Wylie recapitulated the story of the corpse in the creek, with its multiplicity of aliases and its curious relations, laying particular stress upon the incident of the shaven beard, and upon the fact that the dead man had fairly obviously been living in hiding for at any rate some months prior to his death. "So," he finished, "I thought if I looked up what he'd been doing before he died we might get a line on why he felt in such a retiring mood. I've told you what he'd been doing immediately before

—seducing a poor boob of a waitress. Then I thought I'd go a little further back, and came to this hell-hole. And from all I can find out here there seems to have been a pretty fuss and flurry about the brother's death, and it all looks pretty fishy." He summarised briefly his conversation with Mrs. Julie Devene. "So now I've come to you."

"You think," the doctor said, "that your brassy-haired friend's a good witness in a case of this sort? I can't say I should myself. I should have thought——"

"Of course I don't think anything of the sort!" Wylie retorted. "I know she's a lying, gossip-mongering, get-into-the-middle-of-the-picture-anyway sort of a bitch. *But*—she said *you* were surprised, too, when the fellow popped off. So now—out with it and don't go cowering behind your silly medical etiquette. Were you surprised, or not?"

"Half a jiffy," said the doctor. "Let's just see where we stand. Your idea is that this Harold Bittaford who you think was murdered, was hiding from justice because he'd murdered his brother——"

"Or hastened on his death, anyway. If you're sure cancer can't be faked."

"It cannot. Get that out of your head. But why, anyway?"

"Why what?"

"Why any of it? Why murder the brother, first of all? And why get murdered yourself because you've murdered somebody else? You don't suggest poor old Percy rose from his grave to avenge himself, do you? —and private revenge is a bit out of date, nowadays. It doesn't seem to me, anyway, that you've any reason to suppose that your corpse *was* murdered. You've got maggots, Charles—all because he fetched up on your mud-bank."

"You don't believe that," said Wylie shrewdly

"Nor do the police, for that matter. They won't tell me what they're up to, but they're still nosing around the late Bittaford's quarters in Teighmouth, and it's pretty plain they smell some sort of a rat in it. As to why—motive and so on—I don't know. I can think of plenty of reasons why one brother should want to murder another. And from what you say of Harold—as well as from what I've heard of him—it doesn't seem as though he'd need a lot of motive for murdering anybody. But what do you say? *Did* Percy's death take you by surprise?"

"If you'd pursued your inquiries a bit further," Dr. Bunting said slowly, "you'd have found that I did think he might have lived longer. So he might; I should think another three months would have been quite on the cards."

"But he didn't. He died. Why?"

"He took too much of his dope," said the doctor, still more slowly.

"Too much? How much too much?" Wylie asked eagerly.

"About—I should say at a guess about three times as much as he ought."

"You only guess. . . . You didn't investigate?"

"I did not. But I can guess pretty well."

"And you didn't say anything about it? You just let it go at that? My God, Chick——"

"My God, Charles," the doctor retorted, "don't be a bloody fool." As the whisky began to take its effect, his caution seemed to be leaving him. "Listen here. Have you ever *seen* a hopeless cancer case? Do you know what it's like to be one? I thought not. Well, here's a completely hopeless case who's got morphia—actually not prescribed by me, but by another bloke. If this poor devil, who's in pretty bad pain and quite useless to God or man, chooses to hurry things up a bit

on his own—do you think I'm going to raise a filthy stink about it and have an inquest and generally make hell for his relatives ? Do you ? Mind you," Dr. Bunting added hastily, " I'm only supposing I don't know actually how he died, and I don't want to."

" Supposing he killed himself. But supposing he was murdered ? " Wylie said.

" Well, supposing he was I'm not at all sure that I should have been disposed to interfere. From all I can see, he's pretty well as well off out of this world as in it—if not better. Some people are always urging doctors to put hopeless sufferers out of their pain—what about it ? " Dr. Bunting said.

" Doctors, yes. But if anybody who happens to be round took to it—what then ? "

" Oh, I agree you've got to watch 'em a bit. My point is simply that if a hopeless case perishes under circumstances which suggest he may have helped it on a bit himself, I've got a blind eye as well as the next. And if he even had a kind friend who was willing to lend a bit of a hand, I'm not so sure that I should be inclined to ask too many questions—provided nobody else asked 'em either."

" Which they do."

" Which they do, generally. And that's why I'm not shooting my mouth, to you or to anybody, more than I can help," the doctor said.

" So I've observed. But look here," Wylie said, " there are one or two things a bit odd. You see here's this Percy Bittaford, who apparently had a cancer which nobody in his home town knew anything about——"

" Rot. His doctor must have known ; and his wife too, I should have thought."

" I suppose his wife may have. I never asked. His doctor's disappeared—levanted some time ago. But, anyway, he wasn't ill enough, when he left Yeovil, for

anybody outside to know that there was anything particularly wrong. Then he goes off to meet this brother, whom he hasn't seen for years, and turns up here very ill indeed."

"At once?" the doctor inquired.

"I don't know. I've not quite got the dates squared up. But it was pretty soon, anyway."

"He *might* have taken a sudden turn for the worse," said the doctor rather doubtfully. "Cancer cases do, sometimes."

"Perhaps; but it was jolly convenient, anyway. You must admit that. And then they come here—*why* here? What a place to bring a dying man to! And you're called in and you find him fuller of dope than he's any business to be. Was that why he looked so yellow?"

"It wasn't. He'd got jaundice. I tell you, he'd cancer of the pancreas, and didn't need any dope to make him go yellow. Don't try and be so clever," said the doctor.

"Oh, all right. He was too full of dope, anyway. And when he dies suddenly, *of an overdose*, Chick, long before you thought he would. *Don't* you think it's a trifle fishy?"

"Um-m-m. It *is* a bit odd" said the doctor, looking distinctly worried. "All I can say, you know, is that if Harold Bittaford *had* wanted to kill his brother, he could have done it, as far as my knowledge goes But I've no reason to believe he did—nor have you, as far as I can see."

"No, but—— Stop a bit!" Wylie said. "Didn't you say Percy Bittaford was insured?"

"Yes, at least I had an insurance johnny round asking about him. I see what you mean, but, as we don't know how much he was insured for, or in whose favour, I can't see that it gets us much forrarder. Most likely it was in his wife's."

"Most likely; but maybe it wasn't. Do you remember the name of the company?"

"Greenland Widows and Orphans. Are you going to ask them about it? I shouldn't think they'd tell you," the doctor said, with a grin.

"Well, one can but try. We've got to find that out somehow," Wylie said excitedly. "And if it *should* turn out to have been in Harold's favour—you'd agree then that it looked a bit fishy, wouldn't you, Chick?"

"I would. To you. But I'm damned if I'm going to say so, publicly, before you get a lot more information—and *then* you'll have to make friends with your enemies the police, Charles. I tell you quite frankly," the doctor said. "I'm not going to say anything whatever as long as it's a private ramp of yours."

"That's all right. We'll cover your blessed professional dignity all right. Blast!" Wylie said, looking at his watch. "I'll miss the post, and I want to send a line with the glad news to my young friend at Yeovil. Lend us some paper, Chick, there's a good chap. I saw a pillar-box just by your door." He scribbled his note and posted it. "By the way," he said, as after a final nightcap he was turning out into the street, "the girl at that place—Muriel—who looked after Percy's dying hours seems to be an intelligent sort of kid, what?"

"Excellent," said the doctor with vigour. "And thoroughly reliable too. Anything she told you about this affair you may rely on is sound enough. And now for God's sake go, Charles. I've work to do to-morrow, and that place of yours'll be bolting you out if you're not careful."

CHAPTER XVIII

AN UNEXPECTED ARREST

WYLIE had not been bolted out. But, what was perhaps worse, he had forgotten his key, and had to bang and ring, and drag a very haughty Mrs. Berridge from some underground place of concealment, before he could get in. It might have been that, or it might merely have been general dissatisfaction with his character and conduct, which caused Mrs. Berridge thereupon to explain to him that an unfortunate mistake had occurred and that his bedroom would be required for another visitor to-morrow. Wylie was very angry, so angry as almost to resort to threats; but the landlady, as is the duty of landladies, was immovable, and in fury he decided to shake the dust of Marine View from his feet at the earliest possible moment next day. In spite of his haste, he remembered the maid, Muriel, and succeeded in snatching a few minutes alone with her in the early morning, during which he took hasty notes of all she could tell him about Percy Bittaford's last hours—" for the benefit of the Coles " he thought with a flash of amusement. He did not, however, remember to leave his address behind, and it was only two days later, while he was wandering moodily round the grounds of Gracehouses, wondering why the dickens the Daniells girl couldn't send him a letter to amuse him, that the omission dawned on him. He hastily sent off a wire to Marine View and a postcard to Miss Daniells, and went round to the North Sawford Police Station to ask Inspector Cavanagh, for the second time, how one persuaded an insurance company to disclose details

about its paid-out policies. Inspector Cavanagh was polite, for the second time, but no more informative. He clearly did not want to discuss anybody's death with Sir Charles Wylie, and, like Dr. Bunting, had no intention of parting with any information unless the reason for it was made perfectly plain. This Wylie was not going to do. He was proud of his Sands-on-Sea investigation, and wanted to bring it to a successful issue before disclosing it to any one. And if Cavanagh wouldn't tell him what he was looking so official about, well, he could go and chase himself. Full of injured innocence, Wylie went to bed, slept late and heavily, and awoke to look distastefully at the post, which lay on his tray, re-directed from Marine View in a large irritating scrawl. Even the fact that there were two letters from Yeovil failed to move him. Miss Daniells could wait till he had had his breakfast.

He had his breakfast, and a leisurely bath ; and then returned to his correspondence. By this time there was a telegram lying on top of the letters. He opened it with mild interest, and jumped nearly out of his chair. For it came from Yeovil and it said :

" Do come. Ron arrested. Daniells."

" Heavens ! " thought Wylie to himself. " So that was what Cavanagh was chewing on." Without further delay, he opened the letters.

" DEAR SIR CHARLES WYLIE," said the first, which was dated four days previously, and must, he perceived, only have missed him by a bare post at Sands-on-Sea ; " Thank you for your letter, which made me laugh, though I suppose I wasn't meant to. You do seem to have got a bit under the weather and all that, though I don't remember Sands being as bad as you say, not when I was there. But I

don't know anything about the champagne because I didn't get any.

"Anyway, I was glad enough to get something to laugh at, because we've been a pretty gloomy lot here, the last day or two, and worse luck, I don't think there's anything that's any good to you, except about Caroline and Mr. Dawes, maybe, but I don't see why it should.

"Tom Edwards, the looney fellow I told you about, is going to run away, only if you meet anybody who knows you'd better not say I told you because I promised I wouldn't. It was because he had another row with Mr. Dawes; I don't know what it was about this time because I wasn't there. I only heard a bit of a racket going on and went downstairs and saw Mr. Dawes going out into the street looking as black as thunder, and when I got into the garage there was a funny mooing sound going on, and it was Tom, all hunched up behind one of the cars and howling like a baby. Well, I couldn't leave him there like that, so I went and patted him, and told him to shut up and generally talked to him a bit, and after a while he got a bit quieter. But he wouldn't tell me what the matter was, only that he'd lost his temper and gone for Mr. Dawes again, and Mr. Dawes had told him that was the last chance and he'd be sacked if he lifted a finger or sauced him again; and really I couldn't say I was surprised, because goodness knows what he'd do next. But he said he wasn't going to stay and be sacked, he'd cut and run somewhere where he wouldn't be sworn at and treated like a piece of dirt.

"And then he started boo-hooing again, and saying it was the only place where he'd ever been happy, etc., etc., and before I knew where I was I found I was listening to his sad life-story. And I really oughtn't to be sneering at him, poor fellow, because he's had a

rotten time. He never knew who his father or mother was, because he was found in a dress-box under a railway arch, and so they took him in at the workhouse and tried to teach him to read, but they couldn't, because he was soft, I suppose. I didn't know that he couldn't read, but he can't even now, so I don't know how he finds his way about when they send him out with the cars; I suppose he must smell it. Anyway, because they couldn't teach him to read they put him to all the dirtiest and nastiest jobs they could find and when he ran away they got him back and whipped him. Then he ran away again, and this time he did get off, but it wasn't any good to him because he got in with some sort of rowdy gang who were teaching him to shoplift. I tell you, I nearly laughed right out to think of that great gawk shoplifting, but he said he was rather good at it, and it's true he's not half as clumsy as you'd think to look at his hands. Anyway, he got caught, and they shoved him in quod, which was a dirty trick when you think he wasn't much more than a kid, and almost directly he came out he let Percy knock him down with a car he was just taking out of the garage. They carried him into the garage, and found he wasn't badly hurt only half-starved and Caroline upped and fed him, and heard all his story and persuaded Percy to take him on as an extra hand, because it seems they were just needing one at the moment. And there he's been ever since, so it does seem a bit hard that he's got to go now, when he's just learnt the trade pretty well, but is too much of a soft to go into business for himself, I should think. But if he moons about Caroline and she doesn't like it, what can he expect, I told him, only he said it was only just lately she'd seemed to mind, that when Percy was alive it was all right, and even afterwards till a little while ago. So I said why make such a shine, then, why not hang around and it would all blow over

as likely as not? But he wouldn't; he said it wasn't right and there were a lot of things I didn't know anything about, and what were the police coming round about, anyway? So I pricked up my ears and said, What, when? and he told me there's been a policeman around yesterday afternoon asking questions. But, says he, I didn't say anything, and he looked at me out of the corners of his eyes as if *I'd* been doing something. I think he really is off his chump, and whether he does mean to cut off or not I don't know, but he'll give me the creeps if he stays here much longer.

"That's all, I think, except that I'm not so sure that it's true what I told you about Caroline not wanting to take up with anybody. At any rate, I walked into the sitting-room suddenly last night, and there was a great lorry coming down the street just then so that they didn't hear me till the door opened, and there was Mr. Dawes jumping across the room just as if he'd been sweethearting. He didn't half look black at me, either, and I'm sure I was very sorry for interrupting, but how could I help it? But I don't think Mr. Dawes likes me, I'm sorry to tell you. He looks at me as if I was going about prying into his affairs, and it certainly is bad luck that I seem to turn up somehow always when he'd rather not have anybody looking. There was this time and the time I told you about when Tom chased him with the spanner, and two or three other things. I don't know how it is, but if anybody comes into the garage to complain about something I always seem to be there, and there it is. I'm sure I don't do it on purpose and I'm not generally counted a Jonah.

"What it is, I ought not to stop here. This place is beginning to get on my nerves and there haven't even been any old Coles or anything like that to cheer one up a bit. I don't seem to be finding out anything you

want to know, so don't you think it would be all right for me to take Ron back to London soon? To tell you the truth, I don't think it's as good for him as I thought it would be being petted up by Caroline. He seems to get jumpier than ever, and some days I daren't say a word to him for fear it'll be the wrong one. So unless you've really got anything more you'd like us to do, I think we'd be just as well in London, and speaking for myself I'd be glad enough to go."

"Yours sincerely,
"DOROTHY DANIELLS."

"I suppose," reflected Wylie, "that the policeman must have been round after young Bittaford. Otherwise there doesn't seem much to worry about in that lot." He opened up the second letter, which had been posted two days later, and bore, in its handwriting, a strong impression of haste and agitation.

"DEAR SIR CHARLES WYLIE"—it said—"I'm sorry I didn't answer your other letter quicker, but I didn't get it till this morning with the one about the doctor, and I'm in such a temper I can't write properly about it now.

"I thought Caroline and Mr. Dawes seemed a bit nosey about my getting letters in the same handwriting, but I didn't think anything about it till I got your two this morning and I saw they'd been posted different times. Then, if you please, that Dawes called me out after breakfast into his office and said that it wasn't the proper thing for me to go having a lot of correspondence with a man I didn't know and out of my station in life, and that's what he really did say, and that as long as I was under his roof I'd got to stop it and behave decently.

"I was wild, I just asked him how the dickens he thought he knew *who* I'd been corresponding with, and then I suddenly thought and looked at your first letter again, and I'll swear somebody'd been steaming it open. Then I just let him have it. I'd never heard such impudence in my life and I said so, and I called him all the names I could think of, and said I wasn't under his roof and I wouldn't stay under it a moment if I was, but it was Mrs. Bittaford's roof and not his yet whatever he thought, and he'd please leave me alone and behave decently. He nearly choked and then it was his turn and he told me what he thought about me and my father and my brother and all that, and how I wasn't fit to touch any of them, being no better than a pick-pocket. (That's because he's lost some stuff, a watch and tie pin and some other things that he was turning the place upside down for last night, and I suppose he thought I might have stolen them as well as the next, but I've never laid eyes on them). Anyway, we went at it quite half an hour as good as my uncle's yard on a Saturday night, and then he suddenly jumped up and said, 'You'll hear more about this, my girl!' and rushed clean out of the place.

"It's wicked, that's what it is, and honestly I can't stop here another day. I'm going first thing in the morning whether Ron comes or not, and if that upsets your plans I'm very sorry, but I can't stand it. And my address'll be 15 Priory Road, E.17.

"Only, honestly, I've got the wind up, and I don't know what's going to happen next. Because, besides people opening my letters, there was a policeman in the house this morning too, just like Tom Edwards said, and he started asking me questions instead. And they were all about Ron's and my holiday, exactly when we'd started and where we'd been, all the dates

and all the times and most of them I couldn't remember, anyhow. And particularly he wanted to know about one day when we were separated because we had a row over breakfast and Ron went off by himself in the sulks and wouldn't tell me where he was going or what he wanted, and never came back till late, looking like a sick cat. The copper wanted to know what I was doing all that day and I couldn't remember for the life of me, and then he wanted to know what Ron was doing and I couldn't tell him that either, and Ron wasn't in, he was mooning about somewhere. So I just ran out of the place, I couldn't stand it any longer, and I'm writing this letter in a tea-shop because I can't bear the thought of going back there again because either the police or Dawes or both will be there and I couldn't face it. I'll have to go back there to sleep and see what Ron thinks about it, but then I'm quitting and I'm sorry, but I feel like nothing on earth. I can't think what anybody could think that me or Ron would know about killing his uncle who we'd never seen, either of us; but if that isn't it what are they asking questions about?

"I forgot to say Tom Edwards did go, after all. He must have slipped out some time yesterday, and left me a little note thanking me for being nice to him and saying he'd let me know some time what happened to him. I suppose he got some chap to write it for him; anyway, I haven't shown it to anybody and they can think what they like. It makes things a bit worse, if they could be, him having gone, because he was friendly, anyway, if he wasn't much good. Now I just feel I'll go cuckoo if I go back again.

"Oh, I'm sorry, but I couldn't ask Tom about those dates you said, because he'd gone. I'll see if I can find the old geezer at the Free again and perhaps he'll

know, he seems to be the kind of nosey old party that remembers dates. I will if I can.

"Yours sincerely,

"DOROTHY DANIELLS."

And the sequel to that was that Ronald Bittaford was arrested! Wylie gave one hasty glance at the telegram, saw that Yeovil was its place of dispatch, and made a dash for his hat and his car. He debated whether to run the risk of telegraphing his arrival, and decided against. Apparently communications signed with his name had done enough harm already. Surely she would have the sense, whether or not she had left the Bittaford household, to anticipate his arrival and wait to meet him.

CHAPTER XIX

IMPASSE

SHE had. When, after what seemed interminable traffic entanglements in Yeovil, he at last drew near the entrance of the Britannia Garage, he saw in front of him a slight figure in a red beret, who made wild signs to him to stop. He pulled up sharply, and the girl came running across the road to him. Her face was white under the scarlet cap, and her eyes dark and frightened.

"Don't go in," she whispered. "I've cleared out. I've put my bag at a café round in Fore Street, and I'm going to find a room to stop in as long as I've got to be here. I hung about in case you wired and I didn't get it. Come somewhere where we can talk—quick, or they'll see you."

"Right-o, hop in," Wylie said easily, opening the door

and making the excuse of shifting a cushion to lay a firm hand on the thin, tense shoulders.

"Dawes in?" he asked as he turned the car.

"M-m." Dolly nodded. "Came back middle of the night, I mean yesterday night, after we'd all gone to bed. I heard the car. He's in the garage now."

"Caroline?"

"Locked in her room, howling. She's been howling ever since—since they came for Ron."

"Nice for you—you poor little devil," Wylie said. "Never mind, we'll see if we can't pull out of it somehow. This a decent sort of pub?" He drew in to the side as he spoke. "Jump out and find some coffee or whatever you can drink while I get this thing out of the way. Don't rush it, there's plenty of time."

He parked the car, and went into the lounge, where he supplemented the coffee with brandies. "*Café fine*, as they have it in Paris, my dear," he said. "Not that it tastes the same, or anything like," making a wry face. "But I dare say it'll serve. Well, and so the blazing idiots have pinched your boy friend. What on earth *for*?"

"For killing his uncle," Dolly said in a flat voice.

"That's insanity, you know," Wylie said cheerfully, and was surprised to see a quiver sweep over the girl's face. "Why, what have I said? My dear child, you don't surely think that—there's anything *in* it?"

"Suppose . . . what you said . . ." Dolly said with difficulty.

"What? What did I say?"

"He *is* queer . . . he's *been* queer. . . . If he was—queerer than anybody thought——" She looked up with nightmare in her eyes.

"Oh!" Wylie hoped he had suppressed his start. It could not be denied that Ronald Bittaford looked the kind of boy who might suffer from sudden brain-

storms, and if he had—— But it was no use meeting that sort of trouble half-way. "My dear," he said very gently, "don't jump to conclusions like that. Tell me what's in it—all about it. And take your time."

"I've found out what you wanted to know," Dolly said irrelevantly. "The time when Percy went to Sands, I mean. I hunted up the old man in the Free, and he said it was the 24th or 25th of January, and he died three weeks later. He'd noticed it, because it was so quick. That what you wanted?"

"Good child," Wylie said. "That's just what I wanted —yesterday. But now I want to know about Ron. Will you tell me?" And as she suddenly seemed to find it impossible to start, he went on: "When did they come for him?"

"Yesterday evening. Just after supper."

"And they said they were arresting him—what for, exactly?"

"For being concerned in the murder of Harold Bittaford in Devonshire on August 1st, last," Dolly whispered.

"What did he say? Or do?"

"He said, 'No! No! It wasn't!' like that. Then he began to cry, and Caroline screamed, and Dawes took her out of the room."

"And so they took him away. Didn't they let you see him first?" Wylie asked.

"I went with him, to help him get his things together. And I said, 'It's all right, don't worry; you couldn't have had anything to do with it.' But he said, 'I don't know! I don't know! It wasn't!' over and over again. So I asked him if he wouldn't tell me what he was doing the day he went off by himself—and it would be August 1st!—but he only said 'Sailing! I don't know,' and began to shiver till I thought he'd have a fit, and told

me to go away. So I thought, if he was like that he'd better go, and the policemen were decent enough and didn't hustle him, and one of them said, 'Don't worry, missy; we'll look after him all right.' And so they will, I'll bet. Oh!" said Dolly, with an irrepressible choke, "suppose . . . they never let him out!" It was Broadmoor and not the gallows that was frightening her, but Wylie could not pretend that the choice was a pleasant one.

"It seems," he said, putting his hand over hers, "that that's what matters—the day he left you, I mean?"

"Well, when else would it—could he have had anything to do with it? He was with me all the time, bar that one day; and if we hadn't had a twopenny-ha'-penny row about nothing he'd have been with me then, too. And he did come back in a pretty awful state and wouldn't say a word about what he'd been doing. I thought he'd run into a girl or something. Girls always try to pick up Ron, and he never knows what to do about it. Anyway, I didn't ask any more—I wish I had."

"But now he says he'd been sailing," Wylie mused. "Can he?"

"Yes, he can. You wouldn't think to look at him, but he's rather good at it. His father—the one who died—used to take him sailing a lot when he was a kid. And he *does* like to go off sailing by himself, if he can, when he gets into a queer state. He won't ever take me," Dolly said. "I mean, it would've been quite likely he'd have gone off in a boat, if he'd been upset that day. And then—they say that his uncle——" She stopped.

"Got into the water off a boat. Yes, I see," Wylie said. "But that's nothing. There are several thousands of boats; and if, as you say, Ron likes to go sailing

by himself when he was upset, he wasn't particularly likely to have taken his uncle for a trip, was he ? "

" No, not a bit. But *they* won't know that. It's no use telling a copper a thing like that," said Dolly.

" We'll tell 'em over and over again. We'll make 'em listen," said Wylie. " Look here, when did you say this day was ? "

" August 1st. Two days before we—found him," Dolly said. " That's why . . . you see, it just about fits, I suppose, for them."

" And you honestly haven't any idea where he was ? "

" Honest to God, I haven't. I didn't even see which way he went. I was so fed-up," said Dolly, " when he marched in and said he was off, that I didn't even bother to look out of the window. He came back along the Exeter road, and that's all I can tell you."

" Yes. Where did you say you were staying then, by the way ? "

" Shaftesbury. It's supposed to be a sort of show place. I'd had enough of its shows by the time Ron came back. I never want to be near the place again in my life ! " Dolly said.

" I wonder," Wylie said, " if Ron's told the police any more than he's told you. Did they ever talk to him, before yesterday evening, do you know ? "

" Yes ; they got hold of him in the morning, while I was out. But I don't know what they said. Caroline told me at tea-time, but they wouldn't let her stay, so she don't know what they asked him. She was pretty blue about it, but not acting crazy, like she did last night and this morning."

" And Dawes just went with her, and left you to it," said Wylie, with indignation.

" Oh, no, he came back. He only went to take Caroline out of the way, and a good thing too. Whooping like that ! " Dolly said. " He came back before the

police went, and he seemed pretty worried about it. I dare say he's not as bad as I've been making out, and he didn't pray or anything. Just asked what it was all about and why—like you—and they said they were very sorry but they couldn't tell him; and then he asked about visits and so on."

"And may he have visits? I suppose he may?"

"From his family. But I'm not his family," Dolly said. "Anyway"—with a twist of the mouth—"it seems he doesn't want me, so I dare say it's all for the best."

"Rot," said Wylie hastily. "We've obviously got to see him, and give him a chance and he'll be all right. Where's he gone? Where's this police station, I mean? We can't do anything, it seems to me, till we've been around and had a talk with him, and found what the police are up to. Come on, let's beat it."

Dolly directed him to the police station, but there an unhappy surprise awaited them. Ronald Bittaford was not there; he had been despatched an hour back to North Sawford by car, to be questioned on the scene of his alleged crime. And as to other information, they drew a complete blank. No one at the Yeovil police station was in the least impressed either by a title or by the status of a J.P. Possibly, even, Inspector Cavanagh had warned them about Wylie; at any rate, they refused to recognise that he had any *locus standi* in the affair or to answer any questions at all. All inquiries, they firmly indicated, might be addressed to their colleagues at North Sawford. At which Wylie swore, loudly and vehemently, and stamped his way out.

"Damn and blast them! And Cavanagh's just as bad! The whole boiling's in a league to cheat the public—there isn't one of them with a decent amount of sense in his head. What the *hell* are we to do now?" He marched angrily to and fro across the pavement.

"I say!" Suddenly across his mental horizon there had flashed a vision of a quiet, amused face which had seemed to give sympathetic encouragement to his own efforts at detection. "I know what we'll do! We'll go and see that Scotland Yard man—what on earth was his name?—I'll get it in a minute I believe he'd have some sense and not be rolled up in yards of red tape. Jump in! I'll make it, only we'll have to get some gas." Catching sight of Dolly's utterly bewildered face, he began to laugh. "I'm sorry, I'm not really off my chump. Look here." Rapidly he explained his idea, which was to dash up to London, renew his brief acquaintance with Wilson, put the whole case before him, and see whether (as he was in an optimistic mood) Scotland Yard could not be induced to take up the cudgels on Ron's behalf against the police forces of the west. And he wanted—no, he didn't want Dolly to accompany him. At least, he was not sure . . . and he hesitated, half in and half out of the car, until Dolly herself solved his problem by saying that she'd rather be near Ron, in case she could see him or he wanted to see her. In fact, she wanted to go back to Devonshire that night, when she had seen Tom Edwards.

"Seen *who*?"

"Tom—the fellow I told you about, that ran away."

"Why? What do you want to see him for?"

"I don't know that I do. But it seems he wants to see me. At least, while I was hanging about waiting for you a funny little chap came up and said Mr. Edwards wanted to see me private, and would I be at the corner of Market Street at six o'clock. I said what for, and he didn't know, but it was something very particular. So I suppose I might as well see what it is. And—if Ron doesn't want me around"—her lip quivered a little—"I suppose I might as well be holding Tom's hand as anybody's. But I'm going off

to-morrow, soon as I've seen him. I couldn't stay in the place, not for a thousand pounds."

"Right-o, good kid. I'll let you know—where will you be? North Sawford? Um-m-m. Look here, go to the Greyhound, will you? It's a decent place, and you won't be worried. Here, here's some cash to see you through. No, don't be a goose, my child. This is a serious business, and you mustn't go knocking yourself up. Have a decent dinner, and try and get some sleep. I'll wire you in the morning for certain. But I must buzz off now, or I'll never get that Wilson chap. So long. And, I say, you're a damned good kid. Stick to it." He put his arm round her and gave her a quick, firm kiss, before darting off. Dolly, with a half-smile, watched him to the end of the street, and then leant against the wall, her eyes swimming with sudden tears. "Oh, Ron, *Ron*!" she whispered; then, discovering that she was whispering to a long notice about Foot-and-Mouth Disease, which was decorating the wall of the police station, she stood up angrily and moved away, with a last glance of defiance at the abode of law.

CHAPTER XX

CALL MR. WILSON

YEOVIL is a good long way from London; and even an impatient and reckless driver must needs spend some time *en route*, and runs the risk of finding that the big noises at Scotland Yard have left the scene of their activities before his arrival. So that Mrs. Wilson, whose theory of married life was that husbands should be kept in health by the consumption of regular meals at regular times and by retiring to bed at half-past eleven

at latest, was annoyed when the telephone bell rang at only twenty minutes short of that hour, and still more annoyed when, after a brief conversation, her husband indicated that a visitor was to be expected in a few minutes, that the visitor could probably do with a little whisky, and that she herself had much better go to bed. Wilson was not a man who wasted time in conversation, but this indicated a session lasting until midnight if not later. However, she was much too wise a wife to protest; she merely hunted out the decanter and the soda water, and with an expression of eloquent sadness gathered up herself and her darning, and retired to her bedroom. Ten minutes later a loud knocking at the door announced Sir Charles Wylie, dishevelled with the wind and well stained with grease. "Lord!" he said, gulping thankfully at the whisky. "London's a filthy city—full of blasted *people*. I beg your pardon, Mr. Wilson; I've been doing sixty most of the way from Yeovil, and one forgets these damned trams can't. Your department doesn't deal with summonses, does it?"

"No," said Wilson, and waited for his visitor to begin. Secretly, he welcomed company late at night as little as did his wife; but this was business, and part, possibly of his job. He had been using the ten-minute interval to revive his recollections of the Studleigh drowning case, of which Scotland Yard had recently heard no more than reiterate requests from the Devonshire police to have discovered for them an obscure and evasive person called Gayford Tomline, who had landed from Australia about a month ago and disappeared into thin air. Apart from that, he recollected a doubtful though probable case of murder, a touchy police surgeon, an inefficient coroner, and some very odd witnesses—including the boy who, it seemed, was now to be charged with the murder, and this young

man, who was, he thought, more intelligent than the officers of his neighbourhood were inclined to believe. Well, let him show his intelligence by coming to the point.

He did. He came to it quickly, and for all his appearance of flurry, he told his story coherently and well, including both Ron's arrest and the grounds for it, as far as he knew them, and his own investigations at Teignmouth and at Sands-on-Sea, and his conviction that in Harold Bittaford's past there would turn up plenty of motive for his murder. "But, you see," he finished, "all that's got nothing to do with the kid, who'd never seen the chap in his life before, and couldn't possibly have had any motive for murdering him. I suppose they'll say it was sudden lunacy—I don't see how they can say it was anything else; but that's pretty thin, isn't it? And if they go messing about with him they'll let the real chap, supposing there is one, get away, and meanwhile, if the lad is really inclined to be rocky in the head, they may easily drive him clean off it by locking him up and scaring him—and that'll be a fat lot of good to everybody, won't it?"

"I see. You're interested in him?" asked Wilson, who was leaning back in his chair with his eyes half-closed and his finger-tips pressed together.

"I am," said Wylie frankly. "In both of them. I think the lad's crazy, but I think he's a decent lad. And I think the girl's a damn plucky kid, and it would be a shame if anything happened to muck up her life. And I think Cavanagh's a fool!" he finished vindictively.

"So I see. But what do you expect me to do?" Wilson asked. "You don't need me to tell you that Scotland Yard can't butt in on somebody else's case, without being asked."

"Damn! I was pretty certain they'd have asked you," Wylie said. "I didn't think Wyndham and

Cavanagh really believed they could catch a welshing bookie by themselves. But, look here, couldn't you help at all? You see, we—the girl and I—don't in the least know where we are, and that's half the trouble. We don't even know what the police have got against young Bittaford, and they won't tell us. I suppose they'd tell his relations, but all the relations he seems to have got is this fountain of an aunt, and what's the use of her? They won't tell *me*; they think I'm a half-witted mischief-maker—I remember your being good enough to stand up for me once, when I met you before." He took another deep gulp of whisky. "But they'd tell *you*, if you asked them. Or if you could even—though it sounds silly—give me some sort of a chit to Cavanagh to tell him I'm not such an ass as I look, it would be something."

"I'm afraid I can hardly do that," said Wilson, smiling a little. "You know, Sir Charles, what you really want is a good solicitor, to undertake the boy's defence."

"Solicitor, nothing!" Wylie retorted. "A solicitor'll defend him by saying he's off his head. And he will be, by then, if I know anything about him. What I want isn't a defence, it's for the other chap to be caught."

"You're convinced there was another chap?"

"Well—I am, or so nearly as doesn't matter. I *don't* believe all this disguising and skulking about meant nothing. And that business at Sands-on-Sea—don't *you* think it jolly fishy, yourself? Supposing somebody wanted both brothers out of the way, for some reason we don't know of, and got Harold to kill Percy, and then bumped Harold off too? Oh, I know it sounds silly, put like that, but it isn't any sillier than putting it on young Ronald. Why should he *shave* him, anyway? You could kill a man you'd never met, in a mad rage, I suppose, but why on earth should you shave him?

The only way you can explain that is to say he just got madder and madder. And he didn't. Look here, Mr. Wilson, I'm just asking your opinion now, not trying to get you to do anything. *Do* you think it's all complete moonshine ? "

" No-o. It may not be," said Wilson slowly. His mind was running on the unexplained Gayford Tomline, who, so far as he knew, had never turned up at all. What were Devonshire's views on Gayford Tomline, and what did they want him for ? It did seem, from what he knew of the murder, more of a job for a crook from Australia than for a boy, however subject to delusions. But still, he had no *locus standi* in the matter. Not unless the Devonshire police made inquiries, or reported to him. He took a rapid decision. " Look here," he said, " you know I can't do anything to-night. And I can't do anything at all, in fact, unless the Devonshire people call me in. It is just possible—not more than possible—that there may be some inquiry or report in the morning, that may tell me a little more than you've been able to about how things stand. So, if you'll let me know where you're to be found in the morning——"

" I don't know yet," Wylie interrupted. " I've got to find somewhere where they'll take in a stray wanderer with nothing but a car. But I'll turn up at your Yard at nine—no, half-past's safer—to-morrow morning, if that'll do."

" Right," said Wilson, laughing a little. " In the meantime, I'll think over again what you've told me, and see what I make of it. Have you those letters of Miss Daniells with you, that you spoke of ? I'd like to have a look at them myself, if I may."

Somewhat to his own surprise, Wylie had ; and he turned them out of his pockets and handed them over. " You'll find them quite good reading," he observed.

"Matter of fact, it's half reading them that's made me keen about this thing. You can see, if you've half an eye, that that's a damn plucky kid, and I'd like her to come out of it all right."

"I'll do what I can," Wilson promised. "And I'll see you in the morning, Sir Charles." He firmly shepherded out his visitor, who was showing tendencies to linger; and, though it was now one o'clock, settled down to a study of Dolly Daniells's correspondence, comparing it with his recollections and notes of Wylie's conversation. His face was very thoughtful by the time he eventually went to bed.

PART III

THE SUPERINTENDENT

CHAPTER XXI

NORTH SAWFORD IMPRESSIONS

ONE of Wilson's anticipations, at least, was fulfilled the next morning. When he arrived at the Yard, he found on his table a largish document which turned out to be, in the main, a letter from Inspector Cavanagh indicating that the Devonshire County Police thought that they had now laid their hands on the Studleigh murderer, and were therefore less anxious than they had been for news of Mr. Gayford Tomline, late of Sydney. It was an official letter, couched in official phraseology; but Wilson thought that he could read enough between the lines to guess that Inspector Cavanagh was not perfectly satisfied with his case At any rate, he felt there was justification enough for putting through a long-distance call to North Sawford, where he was lucky enough to catch the inspector himself. The inspector, in so far as his mood was discoverable through the telephone, was a little depressed and seemed to welcome heartily a hint of possible co-operation with Wilson, even though the latter spoke as one primarily in search of further information, and dropped only the barest suggestion that he on his side might have something to provide. Certainly the inspector would tell Wilson anything and everything he wanted to know about the case against Ronald Bittaford, and if Wilson had any comments to offer or suggestions to make he would be delighted to receive them. What, did Wilson really think of coming down to Devonshire himself? Excellent; he would be in all the afternoon and glad to see him at any time.

Wilson rang off, gave a few brief instructions to his subordinates, and called for all the information that was as yet forthcoming about Mr. Gayford Tomline. This he found easy to master. Mr. Gayford Tomline had landed from Australia in May, and since then his trail had apparently petered out. Where or how he was now living was apparently unknown, nor was there any information bearing on it beyond the opinion expressed by the Sydney police force, to the effect that, whatever might be Mr. Tomline's present way of life, it certainly would not turn out to be respectable. There was, however, a brief note, appended to this dossier, signifying that some hopeful information had come in the night before, which suggested that Mr. Tomline might be found very shortly. A capable officer had been sent off on the job, and further news would probably turn up in the course of the day. Wilson frowned as he read this final document. This information might prove of great importance, and yet he felt that he had better not wait for it. He glanced at the clock, and began to scribble a hasty note. It was now nine-thirty, and the Cornish Riviera left at ten. He would give Sir Charles Wylie five minutes longer for form's sake, and then he would go. Accordingly, when Sir Charles Wylie, wearing an air of one surprised by his own punctuality, presented himself at ten-fifteen at the portals of Scotland Yard, Wilson was already well out of London ; and all he found was a brief note left by the great man, the perusal of which, however, sent him into the street whooping with excitement. In another two minutes he was driving westwards as hard as he could go, having first stowed safely away in his coat pocket a copy of the *Daily Mail* with a paragraph marked in ink.

The Cornish Riviera can outstrip most cars, and Wilson was in North Sawford long before his visitor.

Arrived there, he went straight to Inspector Cavanagh's room at the police station. Various conjectures and various possibilities were floating through his mind; but it was no use trying to get to work on any of them until he had got a clear idea of why the Devonshire police had arrested Ronald Bittaford, and exactly how, according to current reconstructions, the crime had been committed.

This Inspector Cavanagh was very ready to tell him. "It's not, you know, a perfectly clear case," he said. "There are some bits of it that are pretty foggy, and I don't mind telling you that we're rather hoping the young fellow himself will help us out a bit, when he's had time to think things over."

"Help us to get him hanged?" Wilson asked.

"He won't be hanged," Cavanagh said. "At least, I very much doubt it. I should think 'state of mind' could be pleaded with perfect safety, judging from his manner at the discovery of the body and now, and from the method of the whole thing."

"Yes! What was the method?"

"Well," said Cavanagh, "as far as we can make out he met the man in Exeter, almost certainly by accident. And then he took him out in a sailing-boat which he hired in Exeter, went down the river and out along the coast. There was a row, some sort of struggle at the entrance to the creek where the body was found, and he drowned him. There was a piece of anchor chain missing when the boat was returned, which was probably used to sink the body."

"He's rather a slip of a lad," Wilson commented, "to overpower and drown a grown man."

"Bittaford was no great shakes physically," Cavanagh returned. "And the boy's more wiry than he looks. We had quite a job with him, because one of our fellows said something he didn't like, and he fought like a

young wild cat. I wouldn't put it past him to drown a fellow like Bittaford, if his dander was properly up."

"Perhaps. And you say you've proved all this?"

"Well," said Cavanagh, "we know the boy was in Exeter on August 1st. He was seen, and also he admits he was, though he tried to deny it at first, and he'd refused to tell his girl where he'd been, which makes it look a little fishy, for a start. We also know Bittaford was there; he came by train from Teignmouth, and was seen at the station. We know young Ronald took out a sailing boat from Dean's yard fairly early in the day—he admits that too—and brought it back pretty late that night, with one of the anchor chains missing. Actually, he seems to have been alone when he took it out, so he must have picked up his uncle somewhere else. (He's admitted seeing him in Exeter, by the way; but he won't say what he did with him—naturally.) Then—and this is the most important thing—there were a man and a girl lying in the bracken late that afternoon, at the entrance to Wylie's creek, and they saw the boat come along, and two men on board of her having a sort of a struggle. The bracken's pretty deep there, so one might easily fancy there was nobody about, but the girl poked up her head and saw what was going on, and told her boy to look as well. They saw a bearded man, whom they're pretty certain was Harold Bittaford, on board struggling—or so they say—with another man whom they scarcely saw at all, because he was screened by the sail. They didn't see what happened, because the boat went round into the creek almost immediately and was hidden by the woods; but, as I say, they're prepared to swear to the bearded man, and the young fellow, who knows something about the sea, described the cut of the boat, which was almost certainly the dead spit of the one young Bittaford took out."

" Almost isn't the same as quite," Wilson commented rather obviously. " What did they do then ? Did they see the boat come home again ? "

" No, they'd gone. But it did."

" Ye-es. You don't think they're making up a bit of a sensation, by any chance ? "

" I might," said Cavanagh, " if there'd been anything in the papers about our wanting to trace the Bittafords in connection with a murder. But there wasn't. The young man's a cousin of Poling, the fellow in charge of the boats at Dean's. He heard from his cousin that we were making inquiries about that boat—we were keeping the reasons dark, of course—and so he came along with his story."

" It isn't proof that would stand being mauled about by counsel," Wilson said ; " but I don't suppose you need me to tell you that. You really think the boy did it ? "

" On the whole, I do," Cavanagh said slowly. " I rather wish I didn't, because there are obviously good points about him, and he's very young. But, you know, if he's got this sort of temper, that goes about murdering people he's got a grievance against, the sooner he's shut up the better."

" I was going to ask what the motive was supposed to be. *Had* he a grievance against his uncle ? And, if so, how did he acquire it ? "

" They always had rows, when he was living there," Cavanagh said. " The Yeovil people gave us plenty of information on that point."

" But, my dear chap, he'd never seen him ! You're mixing the uncles."

" No ; it was young Bittaford did that. From the start," said Cavanagh. " You'll remember, he insisted it was Percy, when the body was found, and he's stuck to it ever since, in spite of what any one else can say.

The mistake was pretty easy, if you bear in mind that he didn't know Percy was dead, and that the brothers were very much alike. Just the fact of Percy's having grown a beard, which young Ronald had never seen, would suffice to cover up any minor differences. And I don't suppose he'd ever given a thought to Harold since he was born; he certainly wouldn't expect him to turn up suddenly in Exeter."

"You don't suggest," said Wilson, "that they met by appointment, do you?"

"Oh, no. Clearly, they couldn't have. I don't suggest, indeed, that it was a premeditated job at all," Cavanagh said. "I should have thought it was a fit of violent rage. And there's a psychology sort of fellow," he added; "a friend of the chief's, who's had a look at him, says that he's the type who's very likely to have a phantasy, by which, I gather, he means a sudden homicidal impulse against anything or anybody who'd thwarted him in his earlier days, as his uncle undoubtedly did. Sort of revenging his own ill-success in life, you see."

"For which reason, I presume," said Wilson dryly, "he tried to strangle the uncle who had *not* thwarted him, and threw him into the water. Do you really mean to tell me, Cavanagh, that he went out in a boat with the wrong uncle, and murdered him, and never discovered it was the wrong one? Do you think that makes sense?"

"It wouldn't, of course, with you or me," Cavanagh said, "because we're normal people. But Dr. Paish's whole point is that this fellow isn't, that he was half in a dither when he did it, that all he saw was a man he took to be his uncle, and that all his past resentment boiled up and he upped and drowned him. Anyway, you've got to admit that he never said a word about meeting him in Exeter, that he acted very queerly when he saw the body, and gave us all to understand,

practically, that he'd never set eyes on his uncle since he left him in Yeovil. Dr. Paish says that sort of cunning frequently develops after a brain-storm has passed."

"Oh, he does, does he?" said Wilson. "And why does Dr. Paish, if that's your psychologist, think that he shaved his uncle? And what with?"

"He thinks," said Cavanagh, "that it was symbolic, in a way. Done to make him more like his recollections of the uncle who had bullied him. He was clean-shaven when he knew him, you see; so he'd got to be clean-shaven now. What he did it with I don't know. I suppose he may have had a razor on him."

"Oh, I should think so," Wilson said. "I should think, in fact, that his subconscious sent him into a shop and made him buy one, just to be on the safe side. I wouldn't produce Dr. What's-his-name in court, if I were you, Cavanagh, though there's no knowing what some juries will swallow. Well . . . I must admit you surprised me a bit I expected to hear more from you about Gayford Tomline, whom we've so earnestly been trying to find at your request."

"You might have heard some more, if you'd found him," Cavanagh said. "It certainly was my idea, at one time, and I even pressed it on the chief, that one of Bittaford's ex-associates was more likely than any one else to have bumped him off, if only because there was more possibility of a motive there. But what are we to do? Nobody can find Tomline, or find any trace of his having set eyes on Bittaford since he landed. We can't accuse a man whom nobody can find, on the strength of no evidence whatever."

"So you're accusing Ronald Bittaford, on the strength of threepennyworth of evidence," Wilson said. ". . . Well, it isn't very much more, is it?—unless he gives you a confession. You know, by the way, that

our people think they're getting hold of Gayford Tomline ? "

" No ! Where ? " the inspector asked excitedly.

" Down on the Mile End Road, somewhere. I don't know what there is in it. Nothing, I dare say ; but I've left instructions for anything that turns up to be 'phoned on to me here. You might keep a look out for it, if you will. In the meantime. . . . Look here, there are one or two things that seem to me particularly odd about your reconstruction, and I'd like to see how they bear on one or two things that I've got in my own mind, particularly about your prisoner. Do you think I could have a few words with him ? I'll tell you all about it as soon as I know what I think—at present I'm not sure."

" Delighted," said Cavanagh. " I think you're about as likely to get a confession out of him as any one. He's just along here. You can go straight through, if you like, and I'll go round to Colonel Wyndham's house. I promised to let him know how things were going. I'll be back before long." He summoned a constable to take Wilson along to Ronald Bittaford's cell.

Wilson's first impression of the prisoner who was half-lying, half-drooping across his police-station bed was that, however the case went, he would certainly never be hanged. A very little more, on the road he was at present travelling, and it would be impossible even to exhibit him in the dock. He appeared to be dozing when Wilson entered, and at the sound of voices he leapt up with a high scream and made for Wilson and the constable almost as though he would attack them. Wilson, signing to the constable to retire quickly, waited a moment and then laid a gentle hand on his arm. The boy shied and jumped—he was shaking like an aspen—but eventually yielded to soothing voice and hand combined, and allowed himself to be led back

to his bed. Once there, he sat huddled up and staring while Wilson talked to him of matters indifferent, trying to get the glare out of his eyes before approaching the subject of the murder.

For nearly twenty minutes he went on, gradually drawing Ronald from a vacant silence into monosyllabic replies and thence to whole sentences. Then, after a slight pause, the boy looked up and down again, caught him by the sleeve and said in a half-whisper:

"Mr. Wilson, did I kill him?"

"I don't know," said Wilson in a steadily commonplace tone. "I wasn't there. Did you?"

"I don't know!" Ronald said. "I can't remember. I didn't think I did. But——" He stopped. "I didn't like him . . . I—I thought of killing him, sometimes. But that was a long time ago."

"But you hadn't met him," said Wilson, concentrating on the first puzzle. "You are thinking of your other uncle—the one who died."

"Oh, no, he didn't die," said Ronald, smiling to himself a little. When he did that he looked less sane than ever. "He was quite clever, he only pretended to die and he grew a beard so that people shouldn't know. But I knew him. I knew as soon as I saw him."

"Why did you tell the police that he hadn't a beard, then?"

"Because he hadn't. Not till he was dead. He only grew one when he was pretending to be dead."

"Then you did see him that day in Exeter? Did you know you were going to?"

"Oh, no. He wouldn't tell me, you see, if he was pretending to be dead."

"Did you talk to him?"

"No," said Ronald. "I was going to. But he went the other way, very fast."

"Didn't you go after him?"

"No. I thought—I meant to. And then I didn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I saw . . ." He gave a violent shudder, and stopped. "I don't know—I was frightened."

"But you did mean to speak to him. What did you mean to say?"

"I don't know. I meant to ask him why he'd got a beard. I didn't know he was dead, you see."

"Do you mean 'pretending to be dead'?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Ronald, as if either phrase would do. "But I didn't."

"You didn't speak to him at all?"

"No, I told you. He went the other way, and I went the other way too. I didn't even look," Ronald said.

"And then what did you do?"

"I went and took out my boat."

"Alone?"

"Yes. . . . Perhaps. *He* says I wasn't." Ronald jerked his head in the direction of the door.

"But you think you were."

"I thought so. I didn't look. Perhaps—do you think there might have been somebody hidden somewhere, where I didn't see him?"

"Where did you go?"

"I don't know. I mean, just round about somewhere Quite a long way—west. . . . I don't remember."

"Why don't you remember? Weren't you noticing?"

"I was frightened—and I was angry. I wasn't thinking."

"Angry? With Miss Daniells?"

"Yes . . . a little bit. And with Uncle Percy."

"Why?"

"Because—because I always was—because he always stopped me doing anything I wanted. Because I—I

didn't like him. If he was on the boat I expect I did throw him in the sea," Ronald said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Only I don't think he was—do you?"

"I don't know," said Wilson, looking at him in some perplexity.

"Anyway, he wasn't there when I got back," said Ronald with finality.

"How do you know?"

"Because I looked."

"For him?"

"No. I couldn't look for him," said Ronald, with the air of one explaining slowly and patiently, "because I didn't know he was there. They didn't say at the boat-yard there was any one else besides me. So, you see, I couldn't have looked for him . . . I was looking for the anchor chain."

"Why?"

"Because I think I threw it in the sea. Because it got in my way, and I didn't want it. And when I brought the boat back they asked where the anchor chain was, and I couldn't find it. So I thought I remembered kicking it out of the way, and it went in the sea. But *he* thought it was Uncle Percy," said Ronald, with a sort of giggle. "It couldn't be, could it?"

"No," said Wilson, "because Mr. Percy Bittaford died last February."

"No," said Ronald automatically; and then his face changed, and he looked up at Wilson with an expression that was almost normal. "Mr. Wilson, you're quite wrong. I can't tell you for certain that I didn't kill Uncle Percy, because I can't remember that day, and I get so muddled when they ask me questions. But I know it *was* Uncle Percy, and nobody else. And he knew it was me."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, he looked up and saw me. I saw him look,"

Ronald said. " And then he ran away. And I—I was going after him—but I didn't."

" Why not ? " Wilson tried again ; but the cloud had settled back on his face.

" I don't know," he mumbled , and obvious as the lie was he could not be shaken out of it.

That was all that Wilson could get out of him. He had come to Exeter on the morning of August 1st, in a very black mood after that squabble with his fiancée. There he had seen Harold Bittaford in the street, and had meant to speak to him ; but had been prevented, first by Harold's unwillingness (unless indeed that were the product of his own imagination), and secondly by the fear which he would not name or consider. Then he had taken out a boat, sailed it vaguely westward, probably dropping an anchor chain overboard, and had come back to Exeter alone. He seemed to remain undecided whether or not his uncle had been on board at any time, and Wilson was almost inclined to believe that he had conjured up a phantom out of his own tired and confused brain to keep him company on the water on that broiling afternoon. Dr. Paish—confound him and his kidney—might not be so far off the mark after all. And, certainly, the fact that he had concealed all the happenings of that day, both when he returned to Shaftesbury and subsequently when the body was discovered, seemed to suggest that something had gone seriously wrong. What it was Wilson could not say, nor could he arrive at the source of the inhibiting fear, whatever it was ; and, for the moment, it seemed that there was nothing to be done except to hint to Cavanagh that his charge needed more expert care than was being provided in the inside of a police cell. With a few gentle words he took his leave of the prisoner and emerged into comparative sanity.

" There's Sir Charles Wylie harsking for you, sir,"

a constable said with the shadow of a grin, and at Wilson's nod opened the door and let in a wind-blown baronet in a state almost approaching ecstasy.

"Look here, what d'you make of this?" he shouted, waving a folded newspaper under Wilson's nose. "*Now* do you think it's all moonshine?"

Wilson glanced rapidly through the indicated paragraph, which was headed *Outrage at a Seaside Resort*, and contained the account of the rescue of a half-strangled young woman from the water at a lonely spot on the shore of Sands-on-Sea. It was assumed that she had been attacked by a man, but though her life had been saved with great effort, she was still not in a position to give any information. Her name was Muriel Phelps, and she was in service at a boarding-house.

Wilson looked an inquiry with his eyebrows, and Wylie nodded. "That's the girl," he said, "who told me about Percy's last hours, and who put me on to Chick Bunting. And if you call it a coincidence, that she should get it in the neck two days after having passed on her information, all I can say is that I don't! I'd have gone straight back to Sands when I saw that, only I thought I'd better let you know first."

"M-m-m. This wants looking into," Wilson agreed, staring rather absently at the speaker. "Suppose we adjourn for a cup of tea and talk it over. I want to see Miss Daniells, too, sometime, if she's to be got hold of."

"She's waiting outside, now," Wylie responded eagerly, "hoping for news of her boy friend. How did you find him, by the by?"

"M-m-m," said Wilson again, as they went out.

CHAPTER XXII

A NEW CLUE

WILSON liked Miss Dolly Daniells at first sight. He had always had an admiration for the Cockney spirit, and the fact that her opening remarks, even under present circumstances, were in the nature of "cheek" to her titled collaborator pleased him where others might have thought her heartless. He could see, beneath some rather juvenile make-up, the dark circles and drawn eyes that spelt strain and anxiety, and though she inquired after Ronald's health in an airy tone which suggested that he was suffering from a chill, at most, he did not any the less minimise his own impressions in replying. Truth to tell, he was much more apprehensive about the prisoner's health and state of mind than he would at all have liked to state. He did not think that Ronald Bittaford was certifiably insane, yet; but he thought that a very little more of the strain under which he was at present suffering would suffice to send him over the edge; and, worse still, he could not as yet decide in his own mind what was the cause of the strain, whether it was something that could be dealt with and removed, or whether it was the knowledge that he had, intentionally or unintentionally, indeed killed his uncle. It was partly in the hope of getting more light on this question that he had asked to see Dolly; but he naturally did not put the point to her direct, and contented himself with observing that Ronald seemed very nervous and jumpy, and that something had obviously happened on that day at Exeter which had frightened him so much that he was unable to disclose it to anybody.

Dolly wrinkled her brows. "That's true enough," she said. "I knew he'd got the jimjams, when he came back that night, and I thought there was something behind he wasn't letting on about. But as to what it could've been—you can search me. There's no knowing what'll set him off these days. Why, only the other day he went off into a kind of fit, just because Mr. Dawes came and told him to get up, and I thought we'd have to get a doctor to him before we'd finished!"

"What sort of a fit?" Wilson asked.

"Oh, just a stiff fit—I don't know what they call it. Lay there stiff with his mouth half-undone and his eyes starting out like a frog's. Mr Dawes thought he was shamming, I know—anyway, he'd gone in to tell him it was time he got well and stopped lying about for Mrs. Bittaford to coddle. But he'd hardly got started when Ron went off like that. I touched him and he was hard as a board."

"How did you get him round again?"

"Oh, he came round, all right, when Mr. Dawes gave it up as a bad job and went. At least, when I say came round—he gave a sort of a big shiver, and then his eyes shut and he curled up and went to sleep. He didn't wake up for about five hours, and then he'd forgotten all about it—or said he had."

"M-m-m," Wilson's fears were in no way soothed by this recital. "What troubles me," he said, "and what I gather troubles Inspector Cavanagh also, is the fact that when he found his uncle dead he concealed the fact that he had seen him in Exeter two days previously. If he had nothing to do with—his death, he must surely have realised that he ought to have told the police about seeing him."

"I know." Dolly looked very distressed. "Only—if it was all mixed up with whatever frightened him—you don't know how obstinate Ron can be, when you

want him to do something he won't. I've been at him time and again to tell me what he was doing that day he went off—before I'd any idea it mattered, I mean—and do you think I could get a word out of him? And if he wouldn't tell me, 'tisn't very likely he'd tell the police, is it? I know he was all to pieces, when he found his uncle, because that night, after you'd left us in the pub"—to Wylie—" he went completely batty, and cried, ' I didn't know he was dead! I didn't know he was dead! ' like that. Which doesn't look as though he'd killed him, does it? "

" No-o," said Wilson slowly. " Not as if he thought he had. But if it was an accident—if he had pushed him, say——"

" I know," whispered the girl, growing whiter. " I thought of that. Oh, Jesus! Mr. Wilson, you don't think he did? "

" If he did," Wylie broke in impatiently, " at least he didn't shave him. You don't do that by accident and forget all about it. Cheer up, Dolly; don't let these police maggots get you down. Anyhow, Mr. Wilson, we're getting a bit off the point, aren't we? Didn't you look at that cutting I showed you? Do you take in that I got a bit of information off a girl—something which indicates there's *something* fishy about old Percy's death —and immediately she's taken out and nearly done in? "

" Yes," Wilson said. " It's strange, but it may be only a coincidence, you know There are, unfortunately, too many girls attacked at seaside places every year for us to jump to conclusions, and this newspaper cutting gives no details."

" That's easily remedied," said Wylie. " I'll go back to Sands and get some."

" And from whom," said Wilson, " supposing for a moment you're right about the reason for the attack

on this girl—from whom do you propose to get them?"

Wylie stared at him for a second or two.

"Great Scott! You mean that I'm liable to be stirring up more trouble for somebody?"

"I take it," said Wilson, "that your theory is that somebody, who was responsible for or connected with Percy Bittaford's death, and who may also have been concerned in the death of the other brother, discovered that you were getting information from this girl, and promptly endeavoured to close her mouth?" Wylie nodded. "Well, then. This means that somebody must have been pretty closely on your tracks, must have followed you, I imagine, at least from Teignmouth to Sands, and must have taken notes of what you were doing. Therefore, anybody who has given or may in the future give you information seems to me to stand in grave danger of being suppressed—*if* your view is correct. If I were you, I should certainly give Sands-on-Sea a wide berth for the present."

"Then who'll get the information we want, if I do?" Wylie asked disconsolately. "Are *you* going there?"

"Not at present, at any rate. The police there will give us any information that seems important. And, frankly, I doubt very much whether it's got any particular bearing on our present problem."

"But if you're right," said Wylie, frowning, "the people I talked to in Teignmouth—Fishcote, the Lanes, and so on—*they* ought to have been suppressed too. Or no—they didn't know anything about Sands, of course. And yet I feel dead sure the two things are connected. . . . I say! Suppose the chap was in Teignmouth all the time! I mean—I was just thinking—that lad Lane. He didn't *look* a murderer, but for all I know. . . . And, anyway, he had a jolly good motive

for murdering Harold—only I'm damned if I see where Percy comes in that way."

"I agree," said Wilson. "It is the thinnest of possible suspicions—so much so as to be hardly worth while calling a suspicion To be on the safe side, I passed on your information about the young Lanes to Inspector Cavanagh and suggested that it might be worth his while to look into them a little. I also," he continued, "inquired of Mr. Bittaford's insurance company, who say that his policy was taken out five years ago and that he was then in perfect health, which doesn't help much. We really need some more light on Mr. Bittaford's state of health just before his departure from Yeovil, but it doesn't seem easy to get. The Edwards whom you mention in your letters"—he addressed Dolly—"seems as if he knew most about it. But I understand he's disappeared out of reach."

"Didn't you ever meet him, then?" Wylie asked.

"Sure I did," said Dolly "And for the matter of that, I know where he's living now, 'cause he told me. But he said I wasn't to tell any one."

"Why ever not?"

"Because——" Dolly bit her nails and looked worried. "Look here," she said to Wilson, "you *are* a cop, aren't you?"

"Of a sort," said Wilson, smiling.

"Do you think it's awfully important for you to get hold of Tom? Important for Ron, I mean."

"It might be," Wilson said; and, with a sudden guess at the source of her perplexity, he added in a detached tone, "It is often possible for members of the public to give information to the police on one particular point only. If that particular point is sufficiently separable, it is not always necessary to ask questions on any other."

"Especially if they've given back——" Dolly began

eagerly, and then stopped, flushing. "Well," she said, looking Wilson frankly in the face, "I seem to've given the show away pretty well, don't I? So I might as well tell you that Tom's at 7 Paradise Street, Yeovil—it's a doss-house, really. But he didn't want the cops to know."

"'Fraid of being pinched?" Wylie asked. "What for?"

"For taking the stuff Mr. Dawes lost, that I told you about," Dolly said. "He was in a fearful rage when he cut, you know, and he pinched the stuff, he says, because it was Percy's, and he didn't see why Mr. Dawes should have that as well as everything else."

"Everything else?"

"Oh, the business, he meant. It was a loopy sort of thing to do, anyway, especially as he never meant to keep it. He was going to give it back to Caroline, he said, or sell it and give her the money—I couldn't make out which, and it didn't matter, anyway, because he'd've been pinched, anyhow, the moment he started. Anyway, he seems to have got a bit more sense into him, after he'd had time to cool down, and that's why he asked me to meet him. Then he asked me what he should do, and I said he'd better hand 'em over and I'd slip over to the garage and take a chance putting them back. I could easy say I'd come to get something of Ron's, and if they did think I'd pinched 'em they couldn't do much to me. And"—she turned to Wilson—"I'm telling you because I suppose you meant what you said, and won't mind my putting them back. Because they've nothing to do with anybody's murder, and poor Tom didn't even mean to steal them, rightly speaking. It was only a bit of spite against Mr. Dawes when he'd lost his temper. But you know what cops are to tell things to, generally I mean."

"You said you took them back from him?"

"Yes. I've got them in my bag now, for the matter of that, if seeing's believing. There's nothing much to tell mother about—only the watch and a tie-pin and a couple of sleeve-links." As she spoke, she turned out her bag on the table, and disclosed, wrapped in a workman's handkerchief, a gold hunter watch, old, but of unmistakable quality, a freemason's tie-pin, and two pairs of cheap rolled-gold cuff-links. "There! That's the lot, Tom swore to me, and I believe him. And if you don't, you can ask Mr. Dawes if there's anything else he lost. There wasn't anything more he said, anyway. You won't try and hang anything on Tom, will you?" pleadingly to Wilson, "because I've told you. It wasn't rightly stealing, he was just plumb crazy at the moment. Hallo! What's eating you?" This to Wylie, who had taken the watch in his hands, and was turning it over and over with an expression of the utmost perplexity. "That's real good stuff, if you want to know. My uncle'd take it and be thankful, any day. But Tom hadn't any idea it was worth anything to speak of, and I didn't tell him."

"It isn't that," Wylie said. "Look here. . . . Didn't you say this was Percy Bittaford's watch?"

"Yes, only it's Mr. Dawes's now. At least, Percy left it him in his will, or something like that."

"But it isn't. It's Harold's!"

"What do you mean?" from both listeners simultaneously.

"I mean it's Harold's, that got lost, or I'm a Dutchman. *You* remember"—to Dolly—"the one you said Fishcote must have pinched off him. Look here, it's a gold hunter, isn't it? And there's the long second hand going right round the face, and there's the stop gadget. *And*"—turning it over—"there's the pair of doves *and* the crown, engraved on the back. It must be the same."

"You're a Lost Property Office, aren't you?" said Dolly. "How do you know all that about it, pray?"

"Fishcote told me. In all detail. I bet you he'd had a good look at it, possibly with an eye to pinching it himself. But—Harold's watch in Dawes's pocket—what on earth does it mean?"

"What is this story, Sir Charles?" asked Wilson, who had never heard of Harold Bittaford's watch before. In a few sentences Wylie told him all he knew, including Mr. Fishcote's elaborate description of the watch, and its mysterious failure to appear on Harold Bittaford's body. "And, unless it had a twin, I'll bet you anything you like it's the same watch."

"But if," said Wilson, "Mr. Dawes had it and was wearing it before Harold Bittaford was killed, it obviously can't be the same watch."

"But he wasn't," said Dolly slowly. "At least, I mean I don't know about before Mr. Bittaford was killed, because I wasn't there then. But he wasn't wearing it when Ron and I went to Yeovil, because it had gone to be cleaned and it didn't come back for more than a week, and he didn't wear it then, but kept it in his room somewhere, I s'pose."

"What!" Wilson had stiffened and was staring at her with wide-open eyes. "Are you sure of that? That it did not appear until more than a week after you had gone to Yeovil?"

"Cross my heart, I remember it turning up. At least, I came back for something after breakfast and found him opening it. And that's how I heard it was Percy's. Ron didn't know it. Percy must have got it after he cleared out. Why? What of it?"

"Whatever it is," said Wilson, getting up with a purposeful air, "it's got to be looked into at once. I suppose the police here have the address of your Teignmouth friend, and we have the address of Mr.

Edwards. Then there's Sands—wait a moment . . ." He cogitated for a few seconds. "Look here, Miss Daniells, it seems as though Mr. Edwards regards you as a friend, doesn't he?" Dolly nodded. "Well, can you do one thing, which is important? Can you get back to Yeovil as quickly as you can, find Mr. Edwards, and tell him that at all costs he must stay where he is, at all events, where we can find him quickly? You may reassure him about his theft—as he's made restitution so rapidly I think we can arrange to get that overlooked. But *if* there's anything in this he may be an important witness and he must stay handy. Will you see if you can manage that? And stay yourself, in Yeovil, somewhere where we can find you? Where can you go? Good," scribbling down the address. "And, by the way, I've got some letters of yours which have been a great deal of help to me in getting a line on this case—but I haven't got the replies. I wonder if you could possibly let me have them to look through?"

"As it happens, I've got them in my bag," said Dolly, opening it and drawing out a packet much smaller than her own. "Here you are."

"Thanks very much. And now, I'll ask you to excuse me. I shall have to put through two or three things quickly, before I go to Sands."

"You're going to Sands after all? Can I drive you?" Wylie asked quickly.

"No, thank you. For the reasons already stated. But we shall want you, Sir Charles, if things look like moving. Don't go out of reach, please, and let Inspector Cavanagh know where you are." He paid the bill, and made for the door.

"But Ron!" Dolly Daniells looked at him with anxious eyes. "What about Ron, if you're gone and you want me to go to Yeovil? Who'll look after Ron at all?"

"I think he'll be all right," Wilson said, with a reassuring smile. "I'll have a word with Inspector Cavanagh about looking after him—and it won't be for very long. You get to Yeovil as quickly as you can, and tell your friend Edwards I don't think he's got much to fear."

"You mean," said Dolly, "he won't be prosecuted. Well, if that's what you mean, you mustn't let on to Mr. Dawes what became of the things, or he'll go off the deep end. You don't know Mr. Dawes."

"I don't," said Wilson; "but I'm beginning to think it's time I made his acquaintance."

CHAPTER XXIII

A SUPERINTENDENT'S NOTE-BOOK

IMMEDIATELY upon leaving the tea-shop, Wilson proceeded with all speed to the police station, where he found Inspector Cavanagh newly returned from an interview with a somewhat melancholy chief constable, who did not like the idea either of letting a murderer escape or of setting the hounds of justice upon a neurotic boy. On his table lay the meagre result of a few hours' inquiries about Victor Lane, which indicated little more, so far, than that his employment and his address were as he had given them to Wylie, and that he had been in receipt of an enforced holiday, owing to slackness of trade, during the period named. What he had been doing during that time was as yet not established, nor had the police of Teignmouth yet succeeded in getting into personal touch with either the young man himself or his sister, but they had hopes. Wilson glanced through the document hastily and without much interest, and then asked if Inspector Cavanagh could lay

his hands easily upon Mr. James Fishcote, also of Teignmouth.

Inspector Cavanagh thought he could, and looked an inquiry, to which Wilson replied in a few rapid sentences which made the inspector's eyebrows rise nearly up into his hair.

"Oh-o! So that's the way you're looking, is it?"

"At the moment, yes. And if you could spare the time, I think it might be worth your while to comb the boat-yards of Exeter to see if any one else took out a sailing boat of the same type on the first of August. There must be a good few taking out boats at this time of year—and I understand it's a common enough type."

"I'll do that," Cavanagh promised. "Where are you for, now?"

"Sands. In view of this new information, I want to talk to the people there quickly."

"You'll have to have a car, then," the inspector said. "There aren't any trains to that hole at this time."

"Right," said Wilson. "Get me one, will you? And, if I were you, Cavanagh, I'd have another look at that prisoner of yours. I think he's in a pretty bad way, and I'm afraid if he stays too long in a police cell he'll go clean off his head, which won't please you—particularly if your case goes wrong. Think you could stretch a point and get him out?"

"I don't see why not," said Cavanagh. "Nobody'll be better pleased than I shall, if he turns out to be innocent after all. And you know that."

"Thank you. And, by the way, I've asked Miss Daniells to keep an eye on this Edwards fellow. She seems an intelligent young woman, and I don't think she'll either spill the beans or let him run away. She's going back to Yeovil to-night—you might tell the people there." He gave the address.

At this moment the telephone bell rang, and the inspector went to answer it.

"It's for you, Wilson, from the Yard," he said, handing the instrument over. Wilson took it, and listened for some time, with only an occasional "Um" and "Ah!" for comment, to a long communication from London. At last, with an "All right. No, you can't do any more. Thanks for letting me know," he replaced the receiver, and turned to Cavanagh with a rueful smile.

"What's the matter?" the latter asked

"Exit," said Wilson, "Mr Gayford Tomline."

"Exit? What do you mean, exit?"

"I mean he has exited. He's dead."

"*What?* I say, that looks——"

"No, it doesn't, much," Wilson said. "Mr. Gayford Tomline was run over by a bus, this morning, in Commercial Road, about an hour before our man called upon him. Our man then pursued him to hospital, reaching it about ten minutes before he expired. There seems to be no question but that it was an accident—no likelihood, I mean, that any revengeful person shoved him under the bus. But bang go, I'm afraid, any hopes of getting clues out of Mr. Tomline."

"Well! Plague take him, what did he want to do that for?" Cavanagh said callously. "How does that affect your plans, Wilson?"

"For the moment, not at all," Wilson said. "Whatever he did, he wasn't at Sands-on-Sea six months ago, and that's what I'm concerned with at the moment."

"You think you're really on to something there?"

"*I* don't know," said Wilson, with a trace of irritation. "There may be nothing in it. But you must admit the whole thing's odd, and worth looking into. And almost anything seems to me to be better than your reconstruction," he added with unusual asperity, as he left the room.

In the smooth and rapid vehicle which Inspector Cavanagh provided, Wilson sat very still, with his eyes fixed upon some writing on a note-pad in front of him. The intelligent employee of the Press, however, even if he had been phenomenally alert for copy, could have gleaned little from the notes which Scotland Yard had made respecting the Studleigh drowning case. All that the pad said was (in spaced-out sentences):

"Insurance. In whose favour? Mrs. Bittaford. Yes, but why not?

. . . . . .

"Cancer. When? Why did nobody know?

. . . . . .

"What is terrifying in Exeter? Query, catalepsy—feigned?—at Yeovil?

. . . . . .

"Get watchmaker's address.

. . . . . .

"*Which* had a beard? Why shave?

. . . . . .

"Miss Phelps. Probably coincidence. Otherwise—how could anybody know? And who? Has anybody else asked Bunting?"

For some time Wilson stared at these cryptic notes without, apparently, gaining any satisfaction from them. Then he took from his pocket the packet of letters which Dolly Daniells had given him in the tea-shop, and read them through slowly and carefully, making pencilled notes in the margin. When he had finished he put them aside and took out a much fatter envelope which contained the girl's correspondence. A smile hovered about his lips as he read for the second time the account of the vagaries of Mr. and Mrs. Cole, Tom Edwards, and others of the inhabitants of Yeovil. He

read on for some little time; then, at one sentence, his eyes stopped moving, and he relapsed into thought. After a minute or two, he gave a smothered exclamation, reached for his note-pad and added to its contents the one word, "Tonsils." Then he looked out of the window, and, observing the lights of a plausible town, called to the chauffeur to pull up at its post office, where he alighted. From the post office, much to the excitement of the sleepy clerk whose attendance he succeeded, by means of the police, in procuring, he put through a long trunk call to the Home Office, and another, less protracted, to Colonel Wyndham; and then, emerging with a satisfied expression, told the chauffeur to make all haste to Sands-on-Sea, and gave him, not the police station, but Dr. Bunting's address, as his objective.

The doctor was at home, mixing himself a large night-cap as a preliminary to retiring. Quite clearly, he was not pleased to hear Wilson's ring, and even less pleased to receive his official card. This was not the chatty fellow Wylie had led him to expect, Wilson thought, but a suspicious and truculent man.

"If you've come about this beastly business," was his opening, "you can take it from me that I don't know anything about it. I hadn't any idea what the fellow wanted or anything about him, except that I used to know him in Paris one time; and I'd no idea that he could have wanted anything of the girl except what he said."

"You mean——?" For a moment Wilson was completely nonplussed by this unexpected attack.

"I mean Wylie, damn him!" was the reply, in a tone of extraordinary bitterness. "Your friends from the station have been round asking all sorts of questions till I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels. All I did was to give him a pill for debauchery

and let him talk to me for hours about a chap who died here a few months ago—and I wish to God I hadn't been so amiable! But I know nothing about anything else he may have been doing."

"In connection with what?" Wilson asked.

"Why, that skivvy at Marine View." Dr. Bunting stopped, and stared at him over the rim of his glass. "Isn't that what you've come about?"

"Yes, in part. But not with Sir Charles Wylie."

"Then you won't be very popular with your colleagues here," the doctor said sardonically. "They want a talk with that young man more than they want anything in the world just now, or so I understand."

"Why?"

"Oh, well, it's natural, isn't it? Last person to see the poor victim alive and all that."

"I'm going along to the station directly," said Wilson, concealing a considerable quantity of astonishment. According to the table of dates he had made out in his note-book, Wylie had last seen Miss Phelps on the morning of the twenty-second, at least thirty-six hours before her misadventure. What could she have been doing in the meantime? However, he was not going to betray ignorance to this unmannerly little doctor. "How *is* Miss Phelps, do you know?"

"I'm not attending her," Dr. Bunting said. "But I understand she's expected to recover, though she's not been able to speak yet. Must be a toughish young woman, by all accounts."

"Yes. They'll tell me all about her at the station, no doubt. What I really came to discuss with you, Dr. Bunting, was quite a different point. I understand that you were, personally, not quite satisfied with the circumstances of the death of Mr. Percy Bittaford a few months ago."

"Then you understand wrong," the doctor retorted.

"I signed the certificate, and, as I told the insurance man, he died of cancer of the pancreas, and if he doubted it he could come and feel for himself. If he died a bit sooner than I expected, and did the company out of three months' premiums that's not my fault, is it?"

"But he *did* die sooner than you expected?" Gently, because Dr. Bunting's mood needed very careful handling, Wilson took him back through the history of Percy Bittaford's brief illness and death, but gathered little more than what Wylie had already told him. When the doctor had first been called in, he had found the man in an advanced stage of cancer, weak and half-stupefied with morphia. He thought that the amount of morphia being administered was excessive, but understood it was given on the advice of the man's own physician, whose prescription he had seen for himself. Nevertheless, he had gone the length of advising Mr. Bittaford's brother to reduce the doses, having regard to the patient's physical condition. He had formed the opinion that the very low condition in which he had found Percy Bittaford at his first visit was the result of a sudden "bad turn," from which he would rally and live probably two or three months longer; though, of course, there could be no question of cure. He had not urged very strongly removal to a nursing home, because of the expense and because Mr. Harold Bittaford said his brother was terrified at the prospect.

"Did you ever discuss it with the patient himself?" Wilson interrupted at this point.

"No; he wasn't inclined to discuss anything at all. He was very ill and half-silly, as I told you. And, anyway, nobody but a brute would have wanted to badger him. Besides, there wasn't anything much that anybody could do, and his brother was very careful and attentive. And they were going to go home as soon as he was well enough to be moved, so nobody

was likely to suffer except old Mrs. Berridge. As it turned out, of course, she did rather get it in the neck, poor old thing; but nobody could have told that," the doctor said.

"You said," Wilson asked, "that the insurance company's representative came round and asked you a great many questions. What about?"

"Well, what do you think? You know what sort of sharks they are. What he was after was suicide, to try and make out the poor chap killed himself, so as to do the widow out of a few measly quid. But he didn't get any help from me," said the doctor. "There was nothing whatever to prove it was suicide, and I told him so."

"But you thought it might have been?"

"Certainly it might. Though I'm not sure that he was sensible enough to do it. He wasn't in a noticing mood, when I saw him; but if the brother had taken my advice and reduced the morphia, he might have woken up and taken notice. And then, of course, he might have pined for his morphia back again."

"And did the brother take your advice?"

"Said he did. Of course I don't know. You won't find it easy to prove a murder charge, if that's what you're thinking. And I can't tell you even that the chap had a murderous manner. He was very attentive and kind to his poor brother, for the little rat he was."

"Did the widow seem surprised at his death?" Wilson asked.

"Not knowing, can't say. I never saw her. I understand she remained in weeping seclusion while she was here, and very right and proper too. The friend—Dawes, wasn't that his name?—didn't seem particularly surprised. But I only had a few words with him, at all."

"He was there, was he?" Momentarily Wilson had forgotten that fact. "When did he come?"

"I don't know. Either the day the chap died or a bit before. Then he went back again and brought the sorrowing widder. But I didn't see him that time. Anything else you want to know?" said the doctor, looking anxiously at the clock.

"Only this. I suppose you examined him pretty carefully, when you saw him first?" Wilson asked.

"As carefully as I needed to. There wasn't much doubt."

"Did you notice if there was anything remarkable or distinguishing about him?"

"He had a flaming cancer of the pancreas. Nothing else surprising that I remember," the doctor said.

"Thank you. And had he a beard?"

"No. Nor his brother. Nary beards between them. Nor a tooth either, for that matter."

"Thank you. And now I need not keep you any longer. It may interest you to know," said Wilson as a parting shot, "that I have applied to the Home Office for an exhumation order." He went out, leaving the doctor gasping like a fish.

CHAPTER XXIV

AT SANDS-ON-SEA

It was, as the doctor had suggested, very late indeed. But, late as it was, Wilson decided to go to the police station rather than to bed. This surprising desire for Wylie's presence must be investigated, and also information sought about Miss Phelps. He arrived at the station, and there found a sleepy but alert inspector, who opened, after the first greeting, with an inquiry after the whereabouts of Sir Charles Wylie.

"I don't know, exactly. He was in North Sawford, when I last saw him, a few hours ago."

"You didn't bring him with you?"

"I didn't. In fact," said Wilson, with amusement, "I advised him not to come."

"You did!" The inspector nearly jumped out of his chair. "But—why on earth?"

"Well, for one thing, I didn't know you wanted him."

"You didn't! But I thought you knew—I mean, your message said you were coming down about this girl who was thrown into the sea, and I thought you knew all about it."

"I don't. That's why I'm here," said Wilson. "What has Wylie to do with it?"

"Well, it looks uncommonly as though he were the last person to see her before it happened. In fact, it looks as though he was the cause of her being there."

"How's that?" For answer the inspector produced a sodden piece of notepaper bearing some indecipherable writing. "This was found on the girl when she was brought in. You won't be able to make anything of it as it is, but I've had it photographed, and it's a note from Sir Charles Wylie, asking her to slip away and meet him at eleven o'clock at Harry's Point—that's where the breakwater is from which she was thrown in—because he wants to ask her some important questions relating to the death of Mr. Bittaford. So that's why she went there. And there she was half-strangled and half-drowned," said the inspector.

Wilson thought for a few seconds, turning the paper over and over in his hands. It was possible, as far as he knew, for Wylie to have been in Sands three days ago strangling a girl—but was it likely? Not unless Wylie possessed remarkable powers of lying.

"Is this in his handwriting?" he asked at last.

"I can't be sure. It's pretty much the same as the

only specimen we've got—the signature he put in the visitors' book at Marine View. But of course that's not much to go upon. That's one reason why I'd like a word with the gentleman himself."

"What was the post-mark on the envelope?"

"There wasn't any envelope."

"Does anybody at the boarding-house know when she got it, or what it looked like?"

"Not that I can discover. In fact, she seems to have kept the whole thing to herself—silly little fool," said the inspector.

"M-m-m. Then I suppose the idea is that he decoyed her down to the beach, and then tried to kill her. Why, do you suppose? And why didn't he finish the job? And when did it happen?"

"Your last two questions are easy enough," the inspector said. "He didn't finish the job because he was interrupted. There was a tramp taking a free doss under the remnants of an old jetty that's just by the breakwater there. He, according to his own story, was wakened by some sort of noise—probably the girl trying to cry out, though he can't say for certain what it was—and poked his head out and said 'Eh?' This disturbed operations, and the next thing was that he heard a splash and saw a man making off at top speed along the breakwater."

"Recognise him again?"

"No. Too dark. It was a moonless night, and there are no lights about except a rather miserable lamp at the end of the breakwater. The Town Council'll have to light that part properly now—they've been asked to often enough," said the inspector. "The man was tall, that's all he says. And that may mean anything, too, in that light, and with an observer who's half-asleep. He didn't make any attempt to chase him, of course; in fact, it was some little time before he decided to take

any hand in the business. Then he took a stroll to the end of the breakwater and saw the girl's body bobbing up and down in the water. So he decided he might as well do something, and went off to the coastguard's cottage—it's about two hundred yards off—for help. They came along and got her out, but only just in time. It's been very much touch-and-go with her, but the doctors think now that she'll pull round."

"Not recovered consciousness yet?"

"No. She's been muttering a good deal, they say, but nothing you could make head or tail of. Of course, when she does, it'll likely be all plain sailing, because she'll probably be able to let us know more or less what did happen. But in the meantime we'd like to keep a friendly eye on the man who brought her to that place, see? Only we can't find him; he's not at his own place, and nobody seems to know where he's gone."

"To the best of my belief, he's somewhere in North Sawford," said Wilson, wondering with amusement what would have happened if he had accepted Wylie's offer to drive him to Sands-on-Sea. The result must at any rate have surprised him.

"When did you say all this happened?"

"Three nights ago—the twenty-third," said the inspector. "And by the way, it happened a few minutes after eleven, which was the time of the appointment, according to the letter. So there wasn't much chance for her to have met Sir Charles Wylie and then been attacked by somebody else."

"M-m-m." So far as Wilson's own knowledge of the new suspect's movements went, it would have been possible for him to have committed this outrage on the night of the twenty-third. He had not arrived in London until two days later, and there was only his own word to say what he had been doing prior to that. "Didn't you

ask the people at Wylie's place where he was on the twenty-third ? " he asked.

" Yes, we sent a man there, but they're pretty vague. At home, they say ; but apparently they don't see him half the time, when he *is* at home. He's a queer moony sort of bird, by all accounts, and they get him meals and as often as not he doesn't eat them—so often that they don't appear to take notice of it. They might be able to say a bit more, if pressed, but frankly I'd sooner ask the man himself first, if I could get at him."

" Yes, I see. But why is he supposed to have done it ? " Wilson asked.

" Well. . . . It's most likely, I'm afraid, to have been the usual thing. You know he was staying about in this place for some days before it happened. Well, we've been making a few inquiries, and from all that we hear he seems to have been leading a pretty dubious sort of life, drinking a lot and going about with all kinds of girls he'd picked up. Mrs. Berridge, who runs the boarding-house, had to kick him out because of the way he was carrying on with a so-called grass widow (at least, *she* says she's so-called) who stays there. He'd got some sort of cock-and-bull pretext that he was investigating the case of a man who died of cancer there last February, which as far as I can make out had nothing in the world to do with him—and, anyway, what's there to investigate about that ? "

" A good deal, I fancy," Wilson said. " At least, that's partly what I've come here about, Mr. Marriott, if you'll let me take up a little of your time." As briefly as he could, he gave the inspector an outline of the developments which had brought him into the Studleigh case, and of the way in which it had become connected with the death at Sands-on-Sea. He also gave particulars of the various lines of investigation which he had set

on foot and of the directions in which his suspicions were at present tending. It took some time, because Inspector Marriott had not been following the Studleigh case at all, and was also enormously interested in the contents of Wilson's note-pad. "So, you see," he finished at last, "some of your 'cock-and-bull pretext' is undoubtedly genuine. I don't know, because I haven't inquired, what Sir Charles was doing at eleven o'clock on the night of the twenty-third, but I do know that almost exactly forty-eight hours later he was in my house in London, begging me to take the thing up."

"Yes, I see. That does put a bit of a new face on it," the inspector said, "and it does suggest that somebody —whether it's this fellow you're thinking of or another —may have had a good reason for shutting the Phelps girl's mouth. But, you know, even if Bittaford's death *was* hastened, you'll have a tidy job to prove it."

"You didn't have any idea, at the time, that it was not perfectly normal?"

"None whatever. Dr. Bunting said it was all right, didn't even hint at suicide. I don't believe for a moment, by the way, that you'd be able to make him say as much as he said to you in court. I know Dr. Bunting. And I don't suppose the murderer went and got a witness."

"Unless, by the thousandth chance, this girl was looking when she wasn't supposed to be. If the murderer tried to put her out of the way because of her knowledge, she must know *something*," Wilson said, frowning, "and as far as Wylie's report goes, there's only one scrap— that about the dying man's being uncertain of his own name—which seems to have any bearing whatever on the case. That's why it's so disappointing to find that she hasn't been able to speak yet; she might at any rate have been able to tell us something about the man who attacked her."

"I understand she muttered at one time something about 'dark man,'" Marriott said; "but that may have been sheer delirium."

"If it isn't, though, it fits as far as it goes," Wilson said. "And Wylie isn't dark."

"I suppose," said the inspector, "that if you do find the wrong man died that'll go far towards suggesting there was some kind of foul play. But how do you think you're going to?"

"I've asked the H.O. for an exhumation order," Wilson said. "You'll get on with it quick when it comes, won't you?"

"How will that help you, though? You don't know any useful anatomical details about the Australian Bittaford, that I can see."

For answer Wilson passed over to him the sheet of notes which he had been studying in the car, and pointed to the word he had written down last. The inspector looked at it for a minute, and then burst into a chuckle and slapped his knee. "Well, upon my word! That'll be pretty, if it comes off. I don't think I ever heard of a case before. . . . Well, anything more I can do for you now?"

"I don't really think there's anything more I can do here. But it's very late," said Wilson, glancing at the clock, "too late to be getting on now. I think you'd better recommend me a bed here——"

"The Crown's not bad. Or I'll be delighted to put you up," said the inspector.

"Thanks very much. I think the Crown'll do, and the chauffeur can get a bed there too And I'll get on to Yeovil as rapidly as I can to-morrow morning. I think the next pieces of the puzzle are probably there. But you might get somebody to do one or two things for me first thing to-morrow morning, if you would. I want a wire sent to Miss Daniells, to tell her to meet

me at—Yeovil Station at one o'clock to-morrow, bringing Tom Edwards with her. I want to know more about this watch at first hand. Then I want you to get on to the people at Yeovil, and see if they can discover anything about our friend's movements on the twenty-third, so that we may at any rate know whether he could have been on the beach here in the evening. And then I'd like them to make a few discreet inquiries about the financial position of the Britannia Garage prior to February last. Can you do that?"

"I will. But what have the funds of the garage got to do with it?"

"The insurance, man, the insurance! If I'm right, that's the initial start of the whole thing—that, and Harold Bittaford's sudden return from Australia. The insurance man was suspicious, I gather from Dr. Bunting, but not quite suspicious enough."

"I see. I'll do that. But I still don't quite see," the inspector said, "how you think the fellow got the wind up that something was happening here. He'd left Miss Phelps alone for six months—why suddenly take an interest in her? He didn't know Wylie was nosing around, you see. What put him wise?"

"I—don't—know. . . . Oh, fool!" said Wilson, a sudden recollection striking him. "Of course he knew! He opened the letters—the girl said so herself. I'm sorry, Mr. Marriott, I'll just have to verify that and see that the dates are all right, but I'm pretty sure that's how he knew. However, I won't keep you any longer now; I'll be off to the Crown. If Miss Phelps has said anything more by the morning, you might see that somebody lets me know, will you?"

CHAPTER XXV

THE WATCH AND THE REGISTRAR

AT a surprisingly early hour next morning Wilson descended from his bedroom at the Crown Hotel and asked if there were any letters for him. Just one, said the hall-porter, sent round be 'and not 'arf an hour ago. Wilson tore it open. It was a communication from the police station, saying that Miss Muriel Phelps had had a momentary return of consciousness about midnight, during which she had made the statement that the man who had attacked her was a tall dark man with a beard.

"Good!" said Wilson, refolding the note, and telling his chauffeur to make all haste he could to Yeovil. It was only a small thing but he was in desperate need of small things if he was to have any chance of building up a case against Elisha Dawes. He was by now pretty certain, in his own mind, that the late Percy Bittaford's partner had committed two murders and done his best to commit a third; but owing to the circumstances of the case he was at present almost in despair at the prospect of bringing either of the murders home to him. There was such a shocking lack of evidence. Almost the best that could happen, he reflected gloomily, would be for the girl Phelps to recover consciousness sufficiently to make a thoroughly incriminating statement, and then to die. Then they might have a chance of weaving a noose for Elisha Dawes, which, if the reconstruction was correct, he sorely needed. But, even so, it was not certain; and possibly the young woman herself might not appreciate the means suggested.

Wilson despatched a hurried reply to the police station, asking them to see whether it was possible to find any trace of Dawes's presence in Sands-on-Sea on the twenty-third, and then departed.

He arrived at Yeovil Station a few minutes late for his rendezvous, and found Dolly Daniells standing alone upon the platform. In reply to his hurried query she nodded her head reassuringly. "He's here all right. But he's got stage fright; he wouldn't come on. So I told him to wait in the yard, behind the corner. I sh'd think he's there still, but you'd best hurry, because one never knows. I've told him you won't eat him, all the ways I can think of, but he's plumb scared of cops." She led the way out of the station, Wilson following.

"By the way," the latter asked, "do you happen to remember exactly when Mr. Dawes went away on the twenty-third—four days ago? Or when he came back? I see from your letters to Sir Charles Wylie that he was away that day, but I don't know when."

Dolly considered. "That was the day we had the row, wasn't it? Well, it would be about ten o'clock when he got his hat and rushed off, but whether he went right away then I don't know because I didn't stay to see. I expect somebody at the garage would know. I didn't look at the time when he came back, because I was asleep and the car woke me, but I know it was just getting light."

"You're sure it was he came back then?"

"Well, I don't see who else it could be, because I heard him unlocking. It isn't an all-night place, you know; it's closed at midnight. And nobody else would have been letting themselves in at that time."

"Then he went by car? Do you know what his car is?"

"Might be any of half a dozen. They use pretty

much any that takes their fancy. One of the boys at the garage might be able to tell you, if you're really keen to know."

"Thank you. I'll see when I've seen Mr. Edwards," Wilson said. "Is that him?" looking at a large, loose-limbed figure that had just leapt into a crouching position behind a stationary delivery van.

"That's him. That's the sort of thing he *would* do. Tom! Tom, you goof, come here!" Dolly swiftly slipped behind the van, and soon reappeared, dragging by the hand a crimson-faced giant who had obviously changed into "best"—and very unsuitable—clothes, for the ordeal of meeting the police. "This is Tom Edwards, Mr. Wilson, and he's going to be a good boy and tell you everything you want to know."

Tom evidently intended to be a good boy, but he was not at all an articulate boy, and it was very difficult to extract from him connected information of any kind. Wilson, however, had had long practice with mentally deficient witnesses, and he gradually succeeded in finding out what he wanted to know. Tom, it appeared, had stolen the property on the evening of the twenty-first, the day, that is, before he himself ran away, and only a couple of hours after Dolly had come upon him crying in the garage. And he had stolen it, as he had said, simply because he was in a rage with Dawes and could not bear the thought that he should possess anything which had been Percy's and was therefore remotely connected with Caroline. But he had not long had the things in his keeping when remorse and fear overcame him and he blurted out his confession to Dolly. Why had he not stolen them sooner, Wilson wanted to know. Because Dawes had not had them before, the watch, at least. It only came back from the cleaners—he looked at Dolly, who said, "Two days before." And before it went? Well, he'd never seen

Dawes with it before—only when he began to think he was the boss, and owned the whole place and Mrs. Bittaford too. And he didn't believe Mr. Bittaford had ever given him the watch at all, so there!

"I'm not sure that I do myself," Wilson said dryly. "Thank you, Mr. Edwards, that's just what I wanted to know. You may have to tell somebody else about this, a bit later, so mind you don't forget it. And in the meantime, there's only one other thing I'm anxious to find out—the name of the watchmaker who repaired the watch. Can either of you supply this?"

Tom Edwards had no idea, but Dolly, after a strenuous effort, thought that the name on the parcel when it came back was something like Richards.

"No! No!" said Tom excitedly. "Ricketts—Ricketts! Just by the corner of Gallon Street, past the market. *I* know—I'll show you."

"Then we'll go there quickly," Wilson said. "I'll take you in the car, if you'd care to come. Jump in."

"There's Sir Charles Wylie waiting for me at the place I'm staying," said Dolly a little shyly. "He came back with me 'cause he wanted to know what was happening, and he said nobody wanted him at Sands-on-Sea. Could I——"

"Oh!" For the moment Wilson had forgotten all about Wylie and the desire of the police of Sands-on-Sea to make his acquaintance. Well, perhaps the best service he could do them would be to keep Wylie under his own eye for the present. He shouted a change of direction to the chauffeur, and within a few minutes they had picked up a baronet bubbling with desire for information, which, however, was sternly denied him. Wilson sat in almost complete silence until the car pulled up at the corner of Gallon Street.

Mr. Ricketts was in, a little old German Swiss with large spectacles, a dirt-grained face and red-rimmed

eyes. And it appeared, fortunately, that they had hit the right shop at the first attempt. Yes, Mr. Ricketts had repaired that watch quite recently, and a very good watch it was too—well worth a bit of money spending on it. For whom had he repaired it? For a Mr. Dawes—he didn't know him, but the address was somewhere in Jubilee Street. He could find it, if—— A glance at Wilson's official card removed his hesitation, and he went and fetched down a large and greasy ledger. Yes, there it was—feeling along with his thumb —Mr. Dawes, of 17 Jubilee Street. Sent back on the nineteenth. And when was it brought in, Wilson wanted to know. Why, about a fortnight before—yes, look, it was the second. At this Wylie gave a great start, and pressed up to the counter.

"Do you remember if there was much wrong with it, and what it was?" Wilson asked him.

"Not mooch, *nein*. He needed to be clean. And a little rust, yes," the old man answered. "He had been in the water, and that is not good for a watch. But he was not much damaged—he was a good watch."

"*In the water?* And on the *second?*" Wylie's mouth gaped wide open. "But look here, I say! Harold was in the water, himself, on the second. And if he was wearing Percy's watch, how the dickens could it be here, then?"

"It wasn't on him, when he came out of the water on the third. At least, so you told me," Wilson reminded him, putting the watch in his own pocket. "And it was most probably on the first that he got into the water."

"So it was. But if the watch was in the water, then it must have gone in with him—and then been picked out again. What on earth . . . I say, you'll have to ask Dawes about this, won't you?"

"That is my intention," said Wilson. "In fact, I propose to ask him almost immediately."

"You'll have to be pretty quick along, then," Dolly put in, "or he'll be off on his honeymoon."

"His *what*?"

"He and Caroline are getting married to-day, at half-past two."

"What? How do you know?"

"I met one of the garage boys this morning, trying out a car, and he told me. They've all got the afternoon off. Why, what's it matter? Can't they get married if they choose?"

"No. At least, not if I can help it," Wilson said. "Where is it to be, do you know?"

"Why, at the chapel, I suppose. I'm sorry I didn't ask. I didn't know it mattered, Mr. Wilson," said Dolly apologetically.

"Of course you didn't. But it does matter immensely," Wilson said. "Do you know where the chapel is, and can you direct me there quickly? This is a matter that I absolutely cannot risk. I'm sorry, Sir Charles, I'm afraid I must ask you to get over to the police station as quickly as you can, tell them that I'm in Yeovil—they'll have got the message that I'm coming—and that I'll probably be 'phoning or calling on them within the next hour or so, and they must have somebody ready to stand by. I may want to get hold of a magistrate as well. Oh, and"—remembering suddenly that other messages might have come from the station at Sands-on-Sea—"if they ask you a lot of curious questions, don't worry. I think it'll come all right in the end. But as quick as you can, please. What's the chapel's address?" to Dolly, as he almost pushed her into the car.

Dolly gave it. "But, Mr. Wilson," she asked, "does that mean that you think Mr. Dawes—killed him?"

"I'm certainly inclined to think he had a hand in it," Wilson answered. "But if I can't get there in time now I'm afraid that what I think won't be much use to anybody. Why can't this fellow hurry?" He peered anxiously out of the window.

It was a longish way to the chapel, and when they got there they drew a blank. A decrepit custodian, whom they roused with considerable difficulty, assured them that there was no wedding, either of Mr. Dawes or of any one else, arranged for that day; and though he was immensely interested and excited he could produce no better suggestion than that Mr. Cole might know. But this Wilson brushed on one side.

"They're both members of the chapel, aren't they?" he said. "Then the registry office is the most likely place. Where is it? Now then," to the chauffeur, "as quick as ever you can."

"Mr. Wilson," Dolly said shyly, when they had started again, "I don't want to bother you when you're busy—but I do want to know about Ron. I mean . . . he's pretty dicky, you know, and keeping him in a cell—like that—it'd be enough to send him clean off his nut. Couldn't anything be done?"

"Of course! I'm sorry," said Wilson with compunction, "I ought to have told you sooner. I've been talking to Inspector Cavanagh, and I think you may take it from me that he's looking after Ronald—and finding him some more comfortable place. And I don't *think* it'll be for more than a day or two, anyway—I shouldn't worry."

"Thank you," the girl said, and relapsed into silence.

At the registry office their fortune changed. The notice hanging up in the outer office announced that three ceremonies were to be performed that day, of which the third, timed for two-thirty, was to unite Elisha Dawes, bachelor, with Caroline Bittaford, widow.

Also, the registrar was within, having just performed the second of the three marriages. "You stand by," Wilson said hastily to Dolly, "and keep an eye on the door. And if they should turn up before I come out, do anything—anything you can—to keep them talking. I trust you not to let them in—it's really serious. I'll try and be as quick as I can." And, armed with his official card, he passed through into the presence of the registrar.

Mr. Malcolm MacCallum, registrar of birth, deaths, and marriages for the town of Yeovil, was an amiable, rubicund Scot who was at first sight willing to do anything to oblige his visitor. But when he had grasped that what he was being asked to do was to fail in his duty, and, more than that, to disappear, even though it was only for a short time, then he began to raise objections.

"Ye see," he said, "I am a public serrvant. I am paid be the County Council of Somersetsheer (not, if ye will excuse me mentioning it, be the police forrces), and I am paid to solemnise marriages for pairsons that have complied with the necessary provisions of the Acts o' Pairliament. Noo, if I derelict ma duty owing to representations of yours, sirr, which have naething to do wi' the Acts o' Pairliament, ma offeecial superiors will say, 'What business was it of Malcolm MacCallum's?' That's what they'll say, ye see."

"But, man, it's a question of life and death," Wilson protested. "It's a question of losing the one chance of convicting a man who, to the best of my belief, has already committed two murders and may have committed a third. You wouldn't want him to get off, would you?"

"I would not so," said Mr. MacCallum. "But, if ye understand me, I would not wish any one to be conveected by means of a tampering wi' the law."

"But I am not asking you to tamper with the law," Wilson said, as patiently as he could. "I am only asking you to be unable to perform a particular ceremony on a particular day, for reasons which I have explained to you. And if you doubt the reasons or the desirability of holding up the ceremony any longer, I am quite prepared for you to accompany me to the police station, and, if you wish, to go to the County Council offices, in order that we may discuss the point with your official superiors. If I am wrong in any respect, you can marry them to-morrow, and no harm's done. They ought not to be in such a hurry as all that."

"No, they did not," Mr. MacCallum agreed. "They're of middle age, the both of them, and a weedow should no be that lasceevious. But hoo will I disappear, onyway? Aebody knoos MacCallum and where he's ta be found; it's no reasonable to say he's disappeart."

"You could have received a sudden call from your official superiors," Wilson urged. "Or—you could just spend a little too long over your lunch. You would intend to come back, of course, but just be delayed a little beyond three o'clock."

"Aye, I could that," Mr. MacCallum agreed, and plunged into profound thought, while Wilson waited in an agony of impatience. "Weel," he said at last, "if ye make such a point of it, Mr. Wilson, I doubt ye'll have to have yurr way. And I think I may as well make it a lunch, as ye suggest, the more that I've no had my lunch the day, and I'm against tampering wi' the truth mair than's absolutely necessary. Juist a wee moment while I've a worrd with ma clerk. Hoskins!" raising his voice, "I'm juist stepping round the corner for a wee bite the while the next couple comes. I'll no be long. And noo, ma hat." He looked around in leisurely inquiry.

"Quick! Quick as you can!" Wilson, his point

gained, found a hat and stick with incredible rapidity, and hustled the registrar through the outer office to the door where Dolly was anxiously keeping guard, and into the car. It was just seventeen minutes past two.

"It's as well they're no as impatient as ye thought, Mr. Wilson," Mr. MacCallum observed as he climbed with irritating slowness into the car. "I doot ye'd have found it a wee bit difficult to explain carrying off the registrar by forrce."

"I shouldn't have stayed to explain," Wilson assured him. "Police station, now, quick!"

"I'll ask ye to put me right wi' ma superiors," Mr. MacCallum reminded him.

"All in good time," said Wilson impatiently. "I must attend to the police station first."

When they arrived at the police station, they found what appeared to be at least half of the county force of Somersetshire, all agog with the news which had come in from Sands and North Sawford, and pining for more. In the midst of them, and half in the charge of a large constable, was Wylie, gasping with astonishment and indignation at finding that he was suspected of being the author of the attack on Miss Muriel Phelps.

"But, Mr. Wilson, I wasn't *there*!" he protested. "I was about my own place, down at Studleigh, the whole blinking day. And I never wrote the girl a line in my life—what are they talking about?"

"Never mind what they're talking about. I'll clear it up directly, only I must get on with this now," said Wilson. "You take Mr. MacCallum and tell him what it's all about; he's even more puzzled than you are." He thrust the indignant baronet aside, and disappeared within an inner room, where the inner hierarchy of officials was awaiting him.

"I've committed a felony, Major Corrigan," he told

the chief constable, "or a misdemeanour at least. I've prevented a marriage and kidnapped the registrar. But I hope you'll back me up when I've had time to explain. I suppose you know how things stand?"

"We've had all your messages—from all parts," Major Corrigan said, with a smile. "And there are one or two things come in for you since. They're on my table, if you care to look at them now."

Wilson tore open the two envelopes. The first was from Inspector Cavanagh, giving the information that he had collected Mr. Fishcote, and that he was combing the boat-yards of Exeter for news of a boat similar to Ronald Bittaford's, and had already received some replies of which one at least looked promising. The second made him heave a deep sigh of satisfaction. It was telegraphed from Sands-on-Sea, and was to the effect that Miss Phelps had that morning recovered consciousness sufficiently to give a fairly full description of her assailant, which was appended, and was pretty sure that she would be able to identify him in due course.

"You've seen this, I suppose?" said Wilson, passing it round. "Is it a plausible description of anybody connected with the Bittafords?"

"It pretty well fits Elisha Dawes, doesn't it?" Major Corrigan asked one of his subordinates, who agreed. "At least, it's not like anybody else."

"Good enough to take action on—provisionally?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then," said Wilson, "I want, if I can have it, a warrant for the arrest of Elisha Dawes on a charge of being in unlawful possession of a watch belonging to the late Percy Bittaford."

"On a charge of *what*?" the chief constable gasped. "I thought you wanted him for assault at least, if not for murder. And what's all this about a watch?"

"The watch'll do for the moment," said Wilson. "He had no business to be in possession of it, anyhow—I'll tell you in a moment. I don't want to put him on his guard unnecessarily, and I can't charge him with murder until after the exhumation."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not sure which of them he murdered, or when," said Wilson. "See here, this is how things stand at present." He gave them a brief résumé. "So I want him held, at all costs—it doesn't really matter on what charge—but held so that he can't run away. Then, when we've got him in, we'll try and fix him up properly. That O.K.?" After a little more discussion, the chief constable agreed that it was, and sent off a policeman to see about the warrant. "And there's one other thing. There's a man here—Sir Charles Wylie—whom you've been asked by the Sands people to hold in connection with their assault case Well, I want you to let him go I believe that the case against him is simply a forgery by our murderer: and I think if you ring up Inspector Marriott at Sands, and say I'll make myself personally responsible, you'll find he'll raise no objection. He's in your outer office, if you want to have a look at him."

He led the way out, and walked right into the middle of an indignant Scottish voice saying something about "ma offeecial superiors."

"Oh, Lord I quite forgot," said Wilson. "This is my crime, Major Corrigan This is the registrar that I kidnapped. You'll agree, I think, that it is important that Elisha Dawes should not get married at the present juncture?"

"Will I no marry him, then, the morn?" Mr. MacCallum inquired

"I hope not. Not if I can do anything to prevent it," Wilson answered. "The most important thing, at

the moment, is that Mrs .Caroline Bittaford should not become Mrs Caroline Dawes."

"If that's so," said Mr. MacCallum, "I'll thank ye tae tell me where I can be getting ma lunch."

CHAPTER XXVI

EXORCISING A BOGEY

THE warrant was forthcoming quickly, and that afternoon Mr. Elisha Dawes, already enraged at the unpardonable remissness of a public official, was further infuriated by being actually taken off to the police station to answer to a trumpery charge of having stolen a watch which his fiancée's late husband had given to him while dying. His threats and complaints, however, had no effect on the action of the police, and he was duly clapped into a cell, to cool his heels till the morning. Meanwhile Wilson, who had gone with the two constables to see that there was no hitch in the arrest, made certain inquiries of a garage hand about the doings of Mr. Dawes on the twenty-third, and established that he had left the place soon after ten, in a Morris Minor XL7423, travelling westwards, and had not returned that day, though the car was back by the morning. This information he told one of the constables to convey to Sands-on-Sea, and then went in search of Mrs. Bittaford. Evidence, of a sort, seemed to be accumulating—he had heard, about an hour before, that just before Percy's death in February the Britannia Garage was supposed to be on the verge of bankruptcy, and would have gone broke, every one believed, but for the timely arrival of five hundred pounds from the insurance company—but he was still in need of a great deal more.

Mrs. Bittaford he found in floods of tears, ostensibly at the postponement of her romance and the cruelty of the police. But a study of the eyes which regarded him every now and then from behind the veil of tears and handkerchief convinced him that they were tears of panic rather than indignation, and in the end he took his leave without further questioning, merely informing her, in his sternest voice, that she would be required to give evidence later and must on no account attempt to run away, and stationing a constable at the entrance to the garage to make sure that she did not. If she knew something—and he had not been certain, till that moment, that she did—he preferred that she should be more thoroughly frightened before he attempted to extract it

He then returned to the police station to report progress, and found that they had been in communication with Inspector Marriott, who was quite content for Wilson to do anything he liked with Sir Charles Wylie. "In that case," Wilson said. "I'll take him back to North Sawford with me, and Miss Daniells too. I think they may be wanted there."

"You're going back there at once?"

"Yes, as soon as I've had something to eat. There's nothing more I can do here, and there's a job there that I want to put through as soon as possible. Are those two anywhere about?"

They were discovered, and ordered to snatch a meal as quickly as they could, and to join Wilson in half an hour's time, ready to go back to Devonshire. Wilson, however, would not give them any light on why they would be wanted there. Nor would he discuss the case at all on the drive back, except to inform Wylie that he was unlikely to hear any more of the charge of attacking Miss Muriel Phelps. "They may ask you formally to deny that the letter is in your hand-

writing," he said; "but I should think you would be able to do that fairly easily. It's like your hand, but then he had seen a number of samples to copy." He glanced at Dolly, who flushed angrily. "But I doubt it's being more than a 'colourable imitation.'"

"But what I can't see," Wylie said, "is how he knew I'd got in touch with the girl, or that she was telling me anything. He wasn't following me round, as we thought first, and I hadn't published my results."

"But you had written them," Wilson said. "In a letter to Miss Daniells. And that letter, she thought, had been steamed open."

"Oh!" said Wylie. Dolly said, "The sauce!" and both relapsed into silence.

Arrived in North Sawford, Wilson dropped his passengers, and proceeded to the police station. The person of whom he was really in search was Ronald Bittaford, unless he were asleep, which at eleven o'clock he well might be; but Inspector Cavanagh must first be notified.

Inspector Cavanagh had left the station, but was on the 'phone. Wilson called him up, and informed him of that afternoon's happenings at Yeovil.

"You're taking a chance, aren't you?" the inspector commented. "But I dare say you may be right. And there's something at the station for you that may help a bit. Jacobs is keeping it till you come. It's a boat-yard in Exeter which let out a sailing boat, the same day, to somebody who sounds quite like your friend, who was joined by another man who seems to resemble the late Mr. Bittaford quite a lot. The identification isn't pat—unfortunately the fellow appears to be a half-wit—but he may be a little more positive if he can meet the gentleman in the flesh. Anyway, if it does come off, we'll owe you a thumping debt, Wilson.

You'll have saved us making perfectly gory fools of ourselves, besides shutting up that poor kid probably for life. . . . What's that? . . . Yes, of course you can see him if you want to. I had him transferred to the Cottage Hospital this morning and told them to look after him nicely. But if he's asleep you won't get in. I know that Cottage Hospital matron—dragons aren't in it. . . . Well, so long. See you in the morning."

Wilson decided to brave the dragon, and he must have been either more persuasive or more insistent than Inspector Cavanagh, for he was very soon admitted to the room where Ronald Bittaford lay, on a considerably more comfortable bed, looking vaguely round about him. Already, Wilson thought, less deterrent quarters, combined with the assurance that some one was taking an interest in him, had worked a considerable change, but he wanted rather more than that. He wanted, if he could get it, some information which he thought the boy possessed, and he also wanted if possible to lay a ghost. Accordingly, he sat down by the bed, and spoke in his gentlest voice.

"Ronald," he said, "I think I know what frightened you that day in Exeter. Won't you tell me what it was?"

"No! No!" At once Ronald shied, and turning over hid his face in the pillow.

"It can't hurt you now," Wilson persisted. "It's gone. Listen." He laid a hand across Ronald's shoulders. "This afternoon, Mr. Dawes was arrested in Yeovil He will be tried for killing your uncle."

"I thought—it was me," Ronald gasped, still from inside the pillow.

"I know. But it wasn't. You know that now"

"I don't mean . . . I mean, I thought he wanted to kill *me*. He *did*," Ronald said. "He looked——"

"When? How did he look? When did you see

him?" Wilson asked. "Look here, Ronald"—he turned the thin figure over with a quick movement—"you've got to be a brave fellow and play up. Mr. Dawes is safe, where he can't hurt you, and nobody thinks you had anything to do with it. But a lot of people are involved, some of whom have been doing their best for you, and you must pull yourself together and tell us what you know. *When* did you see Mr. Dawes? And where?"

"In Exeter. That morning I told you about," Ronald said in a whisper so faint that he might have thought Dawes was still within hearing. "When I saw Uncle Percy, and he went away—ran away—I was going to go after him, only I stopped a minute to think. And then Dawes came round the corner. And he didn't see me—at least, I thought he didn't He just looked up and down the road—and his face . I can't tell you, only I can see it. He—he was going to kill somebody." He shuddered again.

"And so you turned back?"

"I couldn't meet him," said Ronald simply. "He was going to kill somebody I thought it was me."

"And now you know it wasn't. Why didn't you, when you got back, tell Miss Daniells that you'd seen him—and your uncle?"

"Because I didn't want to think about it. Or to see his face. I—I wanted to forget all about it. Only I dreamt about it. I couldn't help it," Ronald said.

"But later—when you found your uncle's body—why didn't you say anything then? Why did you tell everybody—or give them to understand—that you hadn't seen him since you left Yeovil?"

"I—I don't know," said Ronald, hiding his face. "I mean—when I saw him—I was frightened. I thought . . they'd be asking me questions. I didn't

want to think about it—I didn't know, really, what had happened—anything about it. And he hadn't got a beard—and he had before. I don't know . . . and I'm always frightened of policemen. I know it's silly, but I am. I—I'm sorry."

"But Dawes—didn't you think Dawes had anything to do with it, then?"

"When I saw him," said Ronald, "I knew he had. Because he'd seen me."

"What, in Exeter?" Ronald nodded. "How do you know? Did he tell you?"

"N-no. Not exactly. But he looked at me, just the same. And he said—or he looked—I don't know which—'I'll kill you, if you tell any one I was there.' And he would—you know he would! And then . . . he made me come to Yeovil, and he used to come and look at me, and talk very softly . . . I can't tell you what he said! But he walked very softly, like a big cat, and he could come up in the night, when nobody was hearing. . . . Oh! please!" He had covered his eyes, and was shuddering as if he still saw Dawes bending over him, half-muttering his indefinite threats. "He *could* have killed me! Please, I can't——"

"You need not tell me any more now" Wilson said reassuringly. "I only want you to be quite sure that it was Dawes you saw in Exeter Are you sure?"

"I'm quite sure."

"And that it was your Uncle Percy, and not your Uncle Harold."

"Yes, it was."

"Then that's all right, for the moment," said Wilson. "Now you can go to sleep, and not worry any more. Remember, Dawes is safe in prison where he cannot get at you. And I'll send Miss Daniells to you in the morning. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Ronald; and added gruffly, from inside the pillow, "I'll be all right—thank you."

. . . . . .

"Dawes," said Wilson to Inspector Cavanagh next day, "was certainly in Exeter on the first of August, *and* meeting Bittaford there. The young fellow is quite certain he saw him, and saw him with murder in his eyes. I'm afraid, though, that we shall hardly be allowed to bring out the second fact in the witness box, so the more we can get confirmed by your boat-yard hand the better."

"Ronald Bittaford says so?" Cavanagh said doubtfully. "I shouldn't have thought we could make much of his testimony, myself. Why, he came pretty near to presenting us with a confession to the murder?"

"When he was pretty well out of his mind," said Wilson. "Remember that it was he who came upon his uncle's dead body in Studleigh Creek, only two days after he'd left him alive and well in Exeter. That is a pretty fair shock, for a nervous subject, to begin with. Then, as he confessed to me to-night, he let you all think that he had not seen his uncle for over a year, in order to avoid being questioned about that day in Exeter, which had obviously shaken him all up. Cowardly, if you like, but he's a very nervous subject and frightened of the police, and you must remember that at that time, anyway, he had no notion that he could have had anything to do with the death—or that it was murder. Then you've got to add that Dawes quite clearly realised that he'd been seen in Exeter, and that his only possible course was to terrify the lad into silence—which he certainly seems to have done pretty thoroughly. I've barely laid eyes on Dawes—there you have the advantage of me—but I've seen that he's a powerful, violent fellow, and by all accounts he's got the kind of forcible personality that's very useful for

terrifying people. He obviously put a hoodoo on Ronald Bittaford, when he had him practically in his power at Yeovil—and, on top of it all, you go and arrest the poor fellow for murder!" Wilson finished with feeling.

"We couldn't help it," Cavanagh defended himself. "We had to go by the evidence."

"I dare say you did. But if any of you had had half the imagination of Sir Charles Wylie, whom your people persist in decrying, you'd have seen that there was something fishy about the result. However, I dare say it will come out all right in the end," was all the comfort Wilson gave him. "How about your boat-house man?"

"Oh, I think he'll be all right. As I told you, he's a half-wit, but his memory seems to be coming back by degrees. And when we confront him with Dawes—after all, if you've ever seen Dawes at all you can hardly mistake him. People with that sort of face oughtn't to take up crime," Cavanagh reflected. "Come in! Hallo, Home Office! It's for you."

"That'll be the exhumation," said Wilson, tearing it open. "They were doing it this morning. God be praised!"

"O.K.?" asked the inspector.

"Quite O.K. The body," said Wilson, slowly and impressively, "that was buried at Sands-on-Sea under the name of Percy Bittaford bears plenty of traces of tonsils and no traces of operation."

"Whereas Percy——?"

"Had his tonsils cut out two years ago. I've verified that."

"Pretty!" said Cavanagh with appreciation. "So we presume that it was Harold, not Percy, who died at Sands, and Percy who floated up in Sir Charles's creek."

"So it seems."

"And, therefore, that Elisha Dawes—and Caroline Bittaford—both lied when they identified the bodies."

"And Percy too—on the first occasion. Don't forget that he was at Sands all along, looking after Harold—or pretending to."

"Yes, of course. . . . Why! Do you mean he murdered Harold, and not Dawes, after all?"

"I don't know," said Wilson. "In fact, I'm not sure that I shall ever know, unless Mrs. Bittaford can tell me. And she is the person I must go after now. I want her story, at the moment, more than I want anything else in the world."

"And you can get it—since she isn't Mrs. Elisha Dawes," Cavanagh said, looking at him with respect.

"Precisely. But it was a very near thing. I could cheerfully have broken that Scotch idiot's neck for him. And if Dawes had been a little quicker with his courting, we should have been too late anyway. I can't think why he wasn't."

"What I still can't think," said the inspector, "is why the hell he bothered to shave off Percy's—no, I mean Harold's beard."

"I think there's an explanation," said Wilson. "I'm not sure that I haven't arrived at it. But I must be off after Mrs. Bittaford now. See if you can't find it for yourself."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE STORY OF A CRIME

INSPECTOR CAVANAGH was not alone in his perplexity about the problem of the beard. Much the same problem was posed by Sir Charles Wylie, who two or three days later ran into Wilson and the inspector himself in the High Street of North Sawford, whither they had repaired after a discussion on the progress to date of the Studleigh case. In those two or three days several things had happened. Ronald Bittaford had been released ; Elisha Dawes had been brought up before the magistrates and remanded, on the same charge, at the request of the police ; the boat-house hand had identified him, with agreeable positiveness, as the man who on August 1st had hired a sailing boat from his yard and had gone off in it in company with another, who bore a very close resemblance to the corpse found in Studleigh Creek—or would have if that corpse had worn a beard ; and the couple who had lain in the bracken had declared, though with rather less assurance, that he was at least the twin brother of the man they had seen gesticulating at the entrance to the creek. Last, but most important, Wilson had had a very long interview with Percy Bittaford's widow, and it was this interview which he had come to report to Cavanagh, and this interview which had brought looks of satisfaction to both their faces.

" Hallo ! " was Wylie's greeting. " You look two pretty well-fed hounds of the law, I must say. What poor devil have you just chawed up for breakfast ? If it's the Reverend Mr. Dawes, I warn you that I'm

on your trail. I am absolutely hungering for news about that pillar of society, and for days I haven't had a crumb. Mr. Wilson! I appeal to your better self. Cavanagh's turned into an oyster since he's been working with you, and he never used to be quite so secretive. Can't you induce him to show a poor fellow a bit of kindness?"

"Why do you want to know so badly?" Wilson asked, detecting a tone of seriousness beneath the joking manner.

"In the first place, because of my satiable curiosity, *and* because I led you to the corpse at Sands after all, and I demand my pound of flesh. But, in the second and more important place," said Wylie more earnestly, "because I have two lodgers at present who are in a worse state of dither than I am, and who, frankly, won't settle anyhow till they know what you're going to do with them."

"You've got young Bittaford!" Cavanagh exclaimed.

"And his girl. Well, what was I to do? They must be somewhere, and you won't let them be far away from here," Wylie said. "I raided that pokey hole where you'd put them, Cavanagh, yesterday, and carried them off. You ought to drop on your bull-dogs for not putting you wise to that sooner. I'm trying—at least, my people at Gracehouses are trying—to feed young Ronald up a bit. But what he needs more than food, and well you know it, is to have his mind set at rest. Now, what about it?"

"We are not thinking of rearresting him. You can tell him that," Cavanagh said.

"And can't I tell him anything else? You know it's a nightmare, having so little idea what happened or how. Can't you use a little imagination?" Wylie pleaded. Cavanagh said nothing, but looked at Wilson.

"Well——" the latter said at last. "It's pretty irregular, Sir Charles, and if I do answer your questions, you must be extremely careful what you say to young Bittaford, or Miss Daniells, and must promise me faithfully that not one of you will pass anything on to any one else."

"Cross my heart," said Wylie eagerly.

"Then . . . it is perfectly true that you have helped us a very great deal, and I do think you deserve some return. What do you say, Cavanagh?" The inspector indicated, guardedly, that he supposed that Wilson knew his own business. "Very well. What is it you wanted to know?" Whereupon, somewhat to Wilson's surprise, Wylie produced his question about the beard.

"Why, I am not quite certain," was the reply; "and unless Dawes presents us with a confession, which doesn't seem likely at the moment, I'm afraid I never shall be quite sure. But I think the simplest explanation is this—that he wanted to be able to identify the body as that of Harold Bittaford, without any risk of any one—Fishcote, for example—recognising it as anybody else's. Percy had grown a beard, in order to disguise himself, presumably; and it was shaved off lest anybody who had met Percy in disguise should turn up and identify it, and so start awkward inquiries."

"Well, if that's so, it didn't come off," Cavanagh commented. "Because Fishcote recognised it straight away—even if young Bittaford hadn't identified it already."

"Yes, but none of you believed young Bittaford," Wilson reminded him. "And nobody could have foreseen that he would turn up just then—and if it hadn't been for him and the enterprising Mr. Hanson, I doubt if there would have been any pictures in the papers,

or if Fishcote would ever have heard of the corpse. It was the chance in a thousand."

"But Dawes said that *Harold* Bittaford had had a beard too," said Wylie "Why? Unless he wanted to give himself away."

"Because," said Wilson, "when he came down here, he heard a certain amount of talk about a beard, and realised quickly that there was something wrong. The original intention must have been to come and identify Harold quietly, with some sort of a plausible story to account for his being in the neighbourhood; and in that case, I presume Harold would have been clean-shaven. But it all had to be changed in a hurry, owing to the publicity. Personally, I think Dawes showed considerable presence of mind."

"Then Percy was really murdered for the five hundred pounds," Wylie said.

"*Percy* wasn't. It was Harold's murder—if Harold was murdered, which I don't doubt, though I do doubt being able to prove it—which was due to the five hundred pounds. Percy was murdered because he was in the way."

"How do you mean?" At this point a constable came up and spoke to the inspector, and Cavanagh, who had already discussed this point with Wilson, excused himself and moved off. Wylie repeated his question.

"Well," said Wilson, "this seems to be the story, as far as I've been able to piece it together from Mrs. Bittaford's statement, and (partly) from my own conjectures.

"In January last, the Bittaford business was in a pretty bad way. It owed a good deal in various directions; and worst of all, it was seriously in arrears with its rent, and the landlord, who knew pretty well the state of things, was threatening eviction unless he was paid by March. The whole amount wasn't very

serious; a couple of hundred pounds would have seen them clear and renewed their credit, but they couldn't see any way in which they could lay their hands on it. Absolutely the only asset they had was Percy's life-insurance policy, and they could not raise any money on that, because it had only recently been taken out, and because Percy, as the company told me, was an excellent life. So there they were, faced with almost immediate bankruptcy, and with the collapse of a potentially quite good business—all for the want of a couple of hundred pounds.

"I imagine Percy and Dawes must have discussed ways and means a very great number of times before they finally hit upon their plan. This is only conjecture, because Mrs. Bittaford was not privy to the discussions, and only played her part under instructions received from her husband. But it seems perfectly clear, from what she has told me, that their only hope lay in somehow cashing in on the life-insurance policy. The only drawback to that was that Percy would have to die, and Percy did not want to die. A corpse which the insurance company would recognise as Percy's was not so easy to come by, even if promiscuous murder had formed part of their plans.

"Then, while they were racking their brains, there came, in mid-January, a letter from Harold in Australia, saying that he had got cancer, that he had very little time to live, and that he hoped his brother would take him in for that little while. This letter must have come like an answer to prayer, particularly in the eyes of Dawes, who I understand makes a practice of directing his life by prayer; and when he learned, further, that the brothers had always borne a strong resemblance to one another, he wasted no time in utilising it. Undoubtedly, his was the directing mind in the events which followed.

"The first step was to make sure that Harold was not seen by anybody in the neighbourhood of Yeovil. So Percy arranged to meet him as he came off the boat, and take him away to some place where neither of them would be known and where they could change identities. Possibly the original intention was to try and induce Harold to be a consenting party to the plot, but when he arrived it was clear that he was really dying and, further, that he was already so dazed with morphia that there was considerable hope of making him a purely passive conspirator. (This did not entirely come off, however, because, as you know, the intelligent maid-servant at Marine View noticed Harold's uncertainty with regard to his own name.)

"Well, they went to Sands-on-Sea, and there the difficulties began to make themselves felt. Harold, although very ill, did not seem to be going to die immediately—Dr. Bunting said three months or so, and in three months' time it would be too late. The landlord would have foreclosed and the garage gone bankrupt. Also, keeping Percy at Sands-on-Sea was expensive, even though Harold paid for most of it. So Harold's death was expedited—this, of course, is at present unproved, but I regard it as certain, both on circumstantial evidence and because of Dawes's arrival in Sands-on-Sea at the time of the death. I think that Percy was cunning enough to refuse to take the burden on himself, unless Dawes were there to share the risk. But whose hand actually gave the fatal dose, I fear we shall never know.

"Up to this point, however, all was successful. Whatever Dr. Bunting's doubts, he held his tongue; the insurance company paid up; the landlord and the other creditors were pacified; and the Britannia Garage not only got out of its difficulties, but under Dawes's sole management began to prosper, even to

the extent of preparing to start business in Northampton. This, by the way, was a necessary part of their future plans. The intention, of course, was that Percy should in due course reappear in the business as Harold, but he could not reappear in Yeovil, where he was known; the deception would have been impossible to sustain. Hence the suggestion of another branch; and, meanwhile, while Dawes was settling affairs and getting ready for the new start—a very competent man of business, Mr. Dawes—Percy went into hiding, grew a beard, adopted a different name (not to say several names), and in effect lived the life of a gentleman of leisure, meeting his wife fairly often at some neutral place Hence his frequent disappearances from wherever he had taken up his quarters.

"I don't know at what point Dawes decided that he had had enough of this. Obviously, he had in some measure fallen in love with Caroline, who seems to attract men, but that might have happened long before. At all events, it must fairly soon have dawned on him that he was working pretty hard in order to keep Percy—for, of course, Percy insisted on being provided with an income as long as he remained in hiding And if Dawes knew, or discovered, any of the facts which you discovered about Percy's way of life, he must have been even less keen to go on throwing good money away.

"Moreover, Percy—or so I gather—found the life of a gentleman of leisure pleasant, but expensive, and was inclined to stick up his price a bit. I suppose that the way he put the argument to himself was that he'd had the bother of dying, and why should he not make a bit out of it. At any rate, I gather from what Mrs. Bittaford told me—at least, reading between the lines a little—that these two rogues began to fall out; and at some point or other it must have entered Dawes's

head that, if Percy were eliminated, the profits from the garage would only have to be divided between two people instead of three, and that he could probably, under those circumstances, enjoy the lady as well. So by some means—though by what we do not know, as Percy destroyed his correspondence—he decoyed him over to Exeter, took him out in a boat, and drowned him, shaving him, as I suggest, as an additional precaution, but not managing that job very well. Then, I think, he intended to appear, quietly, and identify him without any fuss, but was forestalled by Ronald Bittaford and the newspaper sensation. I think he did the best he could under the circumstances, by sticking to the identification as Harold, and by encouraging Mrs. Bittaford to take the boy back to Yeovil, where he could have him under his own eye and scare him into silence. And if he had scared him into an asylum —as he probably would have before long—I cannot imagine that he would have minded very much."

"But," Wylie wanted to know, "why didn't he clinch the business and marry the widow? You haven't said exactly how much of your story comes from Mrs. Bittaford, but it's clear that a good deal does. But I understand that in English law a wife can't be made to give evidence against her husband Wouldn't it have been a good deal wiser to take the risk of talk and shut her mouth in advance? Or am I wrong?"

"You're quite right. The explanation is that he couldn't, because of the lady herself. Mrs. Bittaford's psychology," said Wilson, "is quite interesting in its way. I don't think for a moment that she was privy to either murder. But she obviously regards an insurance company as a perfectly legitimate object to cheat——"

"So it is," said Wylie in parenthesis, "at least, if it's legitimate to cheat somebody who cheats you. I've

been done out of more than I should like to count, by insurance companies. And look at the goldarned profits they make!"

"Anyhow, she has no real sense of guilt about the fraud to which she was a party, though she knows perfectly well that it was a punishable crime. Nor has she any suspicion that Harold's death was not perfectly natural; as a matter of fact, when you discount her fright and her tears, she is more indignant that any one should interfere with such an obviously sensible way of making five hundred pounds than anything else. When she heard that Percy had been found drowned, she was very much shocked and distressed; I do not think she cared for him in anything except the mildest possible way, but she was quite prepared to give him his reasonable due of mourning—until Dawes explained that if they admitted that the corpse was Percy's that involved confessing their previous fraud, and that they would both, in all probability, go to prison. Then she agreed that the corpse must be Harold's. Perjury, as far as I can make out, means nothing to her—in which respect she's not so singular as you might think. And I really believe, also, that almost up to the last, she had no idea that Percy's death was not natural, also, or at the worst, the result of some purely accidental squabble in which neither she nor Dawes was concerned. Ronald's behaviour worried her a little, but all her remedy for that was to cure him with pills and possets, meanwhile keeping him in her own care, even if that meant affronting Dawes's ideas of the conventions. For those conventions she herself has no respect whatever.

"And why she didn't marry Dawes was perfectly simple; she didn't want to. She didn't care for him, and, like Sophie Tucker, she was doing very well the way she was. It was only when Dawes told her some-

thing of what was going on, and suggested that the police would be asking her questions—about the fraud, not about the murder—unless she forestalled that by marrying him, that she consented But by then it was just too late."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Wylie, having taken in this exposition. "*What* a female! and what a problem for the Law! Personally, I'm inclined to sympathise with her—I mean, as far as her own part is concerned. Why shouldn't a legitimate service to man have the five hundred quid, instead of some guinea-pig director of the Greenland Widows? But I don't suppose you'll look at it in that light."

"Unfortunately," said Wilson, "our job is supposed to be the prevention of fraud, on the whole—no matter who sympathises with the defrauders."

"'On the whole' is good," Wylie returned. "I can point out to you, whenever you feel like receiving the information, any amount of fraud which you don't prevent, or even try to. But I suppose that's not your fault. And, anyway, I think I draw the line at murder. But I'm sorry I didn't cultivate that interesting lady better while I had the chance. I suppose you'll have her up for perjury, now?"

"That's as may be," Wilson said. "Her evidence is of considerable importance to the Crown case."

"I should think it is!" Wylie said. "Indeed, without her I don't see how you've a ghost of a chance of pulling it off. *Are* you going to get him, do you think?"

"It'll be touch and go," said Wilson; "but I'm inclined to think we shall. Our first point is that we know that it was Harold who died at Sands, and that Dawes, therefore, perjured himself twice in identifying the brothers. Then we know that he was in Exeter with Percy on the first of August, and that the two of them went out together on board a sailing boat. We

can have a good shot, also, at proving that he and Percy were quarrelling on board that boat as it entered your creek. This was the last time that Percy was seen alive; and the next time he appeared was on the third of August, drowned, with marks of a struggle on his body, and shaved—shaved after death. I think Dawes will have some difficulty in explaining how he came to return to Exeter alone, and what had happened to Percy in the meantime—particularly in view of the fact that he was in possession of the watch which Percy was wearing a day or two before his death—and that he lied about it. It was a most unwise piece of greed on his part to retrieve that watch from Percy's body; it is going to be a nasty piece of evidence against him. Finally, there is whatever can be made out of Miss Phelps's testimony when she is well enough to give it. It's not quite certain, I regret to say. If Dawes has a good counsel, there'll be a considerable amount of confusing of the evidence, but I think the cumulative effect ought to do it. Of course," said Wilson, "if we find there's any serious risk of an acquittal, we shall drop the murder charge, and confine ourselves to the assault on Miss Phelps, which I think we shall be able to prove up to the hilt. But I hope we shall have better luck. I want to see the last of Mr. Dawes."

"So do I, oddly enough," said Wylie. "I may stand up for frauds, especially when they're amiable friendly frauds like Mr. Bittaford, but I've no use for promiscuous murderers. When did you leap to the conclusion that he was guilty, by the way, and why?"

"I didn't leap," said Wilson. "When I heard of the case first, I noticed that, *if* it was murder, which wasn't perfectly certain at the time, he was obviously one of the people who should be remembered, because he was closely connected with the Bittaford family. But as

long as the drowned man was Harold, there seemed to be no reason why he should be murdered."

"Unless he knew something he didn't ought," Wylie said.

"Quite so. But until we knew a little bit more about the events of the previous six months, there wasn't anything very obvious that he could have known. That, of course, was where your investigations came in, and very useful they were; but, at first, all they seemed to indicate was that Harold Bittaford had something in his life which wouldn't bear looking into—not Dawes."

"So that was why you weren't keen to go to Sands—why you thought it was a mare's nest," Wylie said. "What changed your view?"

"The discovery about the watch," Wilson replied, "which again we owe to you and Miss Daniells together. This made it pretty certain that Dawes had *something* to do with the death in the creek. And when I coupled that with Ronald Bittaford's surprising insistence that the corpse was Percy's—which I didn't believe was any sort of delusion—the whole story became, not plain, but at least indicated. And it was then that I came definitely to the conclusion that the corpses had the wrong names; but it was pretty difficult to see how it could be proved—until I re-read Miss Daniells's letters, and found that Percy had had his tonsils removed. I could, of course, have tried to frighten Mrs. Bittaford into a confession, and if Harold had been thoughtless enough to have had the same operation, I should have had had to—but it was much easier when I knew for certain that she and Dawes had lied. Of course, his was the instigation—his and her husband's."

"I see. Well, I hope you get him," Wylie repeated. "I don't like murderers—I like them even less when they're Pentecostal what-ever-it-is. I've no use for

persons who invoke Divinity as their justification for their most unpleasant activities."

"In this connection," Wilson observed, "we have a document which might interest you. When they searched Dawes at the station they found in an inner pocket a sheet of a letter signed P.B., very worn and dirty, as though he had been carrying it about for months. There's a good deal in it about his financial position, etc., but the operative sentences are these, as far as I remember. 'All right. I'll stay dead longer, if that suits you. Only I must have some more cash.' Of course it's not evidence one could bring before a court; but the phrasing, and the fact that Dawes was carrying it about with him in spite of the risks, suggest pretty strongly to me that he was regarding it as some kind of an omen—that even, possibly, it was that letter which first put the idea of murder into his mind. Percy says he'll 'stay dead a bit longer;' and he stays dead for ever. Do you see?"

"Dirty squaretoes," said Wylie, whose own religious education, such as it was, had been conducted strictly on Established lines. "I hope you hang him good and plenty."

. . . . . .

This hope was fulfilled. After a protracted trial, the Studleigh murderer was hanged in Exeter Gaol in November, 1931.

LONDON AND GLASGOW: COLLINS' CLEAR-TYPE PRESS

IF YOU ENJOYED THIS BOOK
then you will enjoy other **CRIME CLUB** books

JOIN
THE CRIME CLUB

and make sure of being informed of the best new detective fiction.

The object of The Crime Club is to provide that vast section of the British Public which likes a good detective story, with a continual supply of first class books by the finest writers of detective fiction. The Panel of five experts selects the good and eliminates the bad, and ensures that every book published under The Crime Club mark is a clean and intriguing example of this class of literature. Crime Club books are not mere thrillers. They are restricted to works in which there is a definite crime problem, an honest detective process, with a credible and logical solution.

Members of The Crime Club receive the Crime Club news, issued quarterly and bringing them full details of each new season's publications.

Send a postcard to:

THE **CRIME CLUB** LTD.,
48 PALL MALL, LONDON, S.W. 1

MEMBERSHIP IS FREE

Have You Read

G. D. H. & M. COLE'S

Last Crime Club Book?

Death of a Star

" Mr. and Mrs. Cole excel once again. These accomplished compilers of crime and mystery here completely baffle the reader."—*Morning Post.*

" I enjoy all of Mr. and Mrs. Cole's stories, and the new one is quite as attractive as any of its predecessors." —RALPH STRAUS.

" I congratulate them on one of the best books they have ever written."—*John o' London's Weekly.*

" How well they know what they write about, and how well they write. Their observation is keener than ever, their people more human and likeable and their problem so well worked out that we were surprised, but not *too* surprised, by the solution. . . ."—*Everyman.*

" To one person at least this novel is worth all Mr. Cole's efforts in the realm of Political Economy put together." —*Everyman.*

Have You Read

MARTIN PORLOCK'S

X v. REX

Selected by the Crime Club

Recommended by the Book Society

X v. REX is, we believe, the detective story of the year—perhaps of years. You may have read Mr. Porlock's previous books, *Mystery in Kensington Gore* and *Mystery at Friar's Pardon*; you may have read every book the Crime Club has published; we still venture to suggest that this is one of the half-dozen best detective books you have ever read.

The central theme of the book is a man who has a mania for killing policemen—which explains the title, X v. the Law. In the course of the book nearly a dozen policemen must be despatched in various brutal and ingenious ways. In fact, the succession of unexplained and inexplicable murders is beginning seriously to affect the nerves of the whole country.

You might be able to murder three or four policemen in succession, but when once those murders had been linked and the whole Force put on their guard, instructed to keep strangers at a safe distance, beats doubled so far as possible, etc., etc., a good deal of ingenuity is required to keep up the procedure and remain undiscovered.

We will not even allude to some of the ingenious ways in which policemen, even on point duty in the middle of London's busiest thoroughfares, mounted police in broad daylight, etc., are efficiently murdered, for so to do would obviously detract from the excitement of reading this book. We will just say: "Congratulations, Martin Porlock, on the detective book of the year."

NEW 7/6 CRIME CLUB NOVELS

MARTIN PORLOCK

Author of *Mystery at Friar's Pardon*, *Mystery in Kensington Gore*, etc.

X v. REX

THE central character in this thrilling mystery is a man whose hobby—quite mad, apparently illogical and certainly lamentable—was killing policemen. To his queer, mad mind, men in blue stood as the incarnation of that law and order for which X had long ceased to have any regard. Each murder is carried out with a diabolical ingenuity that completely baffles the Yard, until——. Definitely one of the best detective novels we have ever published.

HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of *Dead Man's Hat*, *Easy to Kill*, etc.

THE RING OF EYES

HULBERT FOOTNER'S knowledge of the New York Underworld is profound. He makes excellent use of this material in his new mystery story attractively entitled *The Ring of Eyes*, which, written at whirlwind speed, passes breathlessly from thrill to thrill. Never a more exciting story of the American Underworld has been put before the public. *The Ring of Eyes* certainly has the Ring of Truth.